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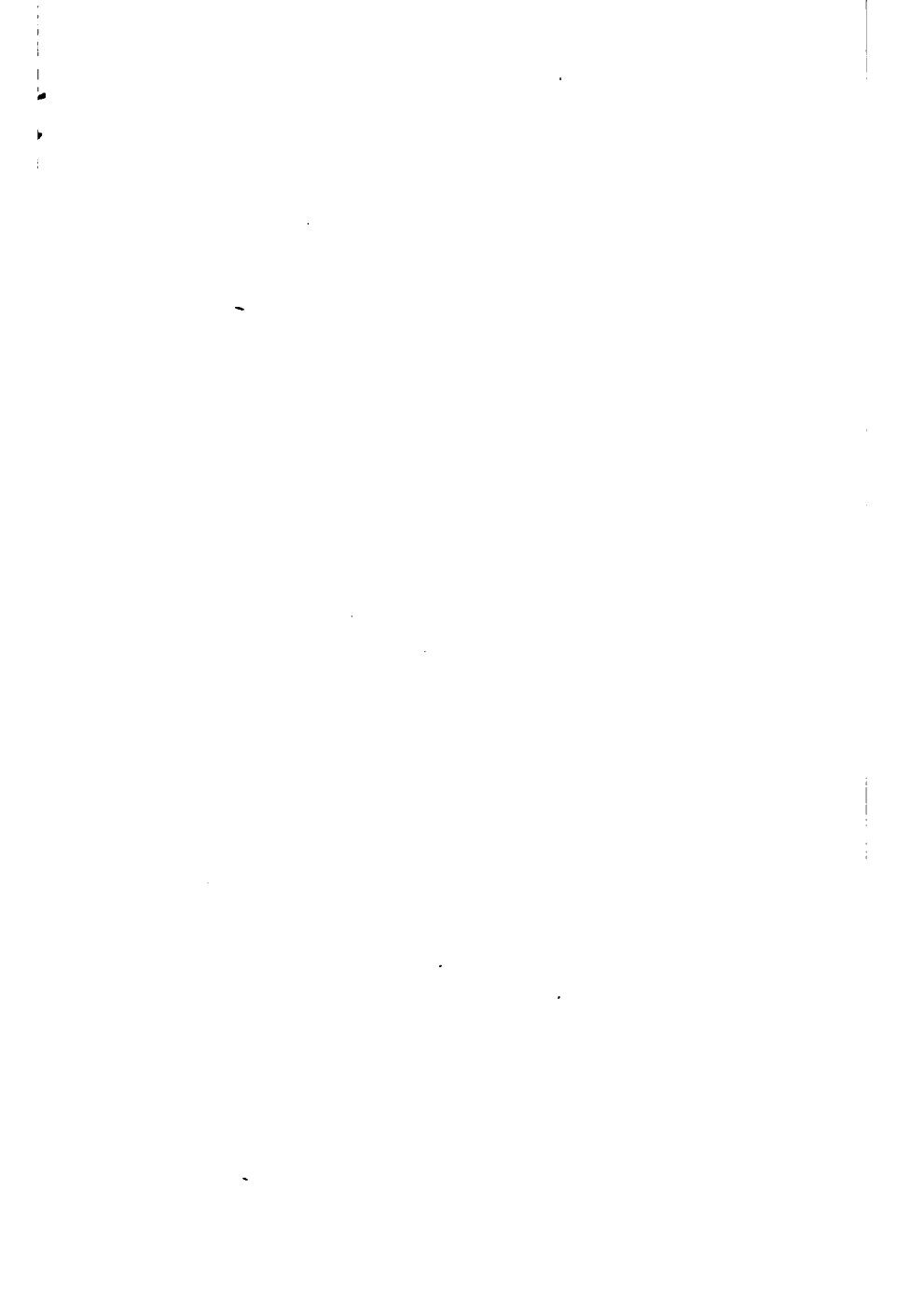
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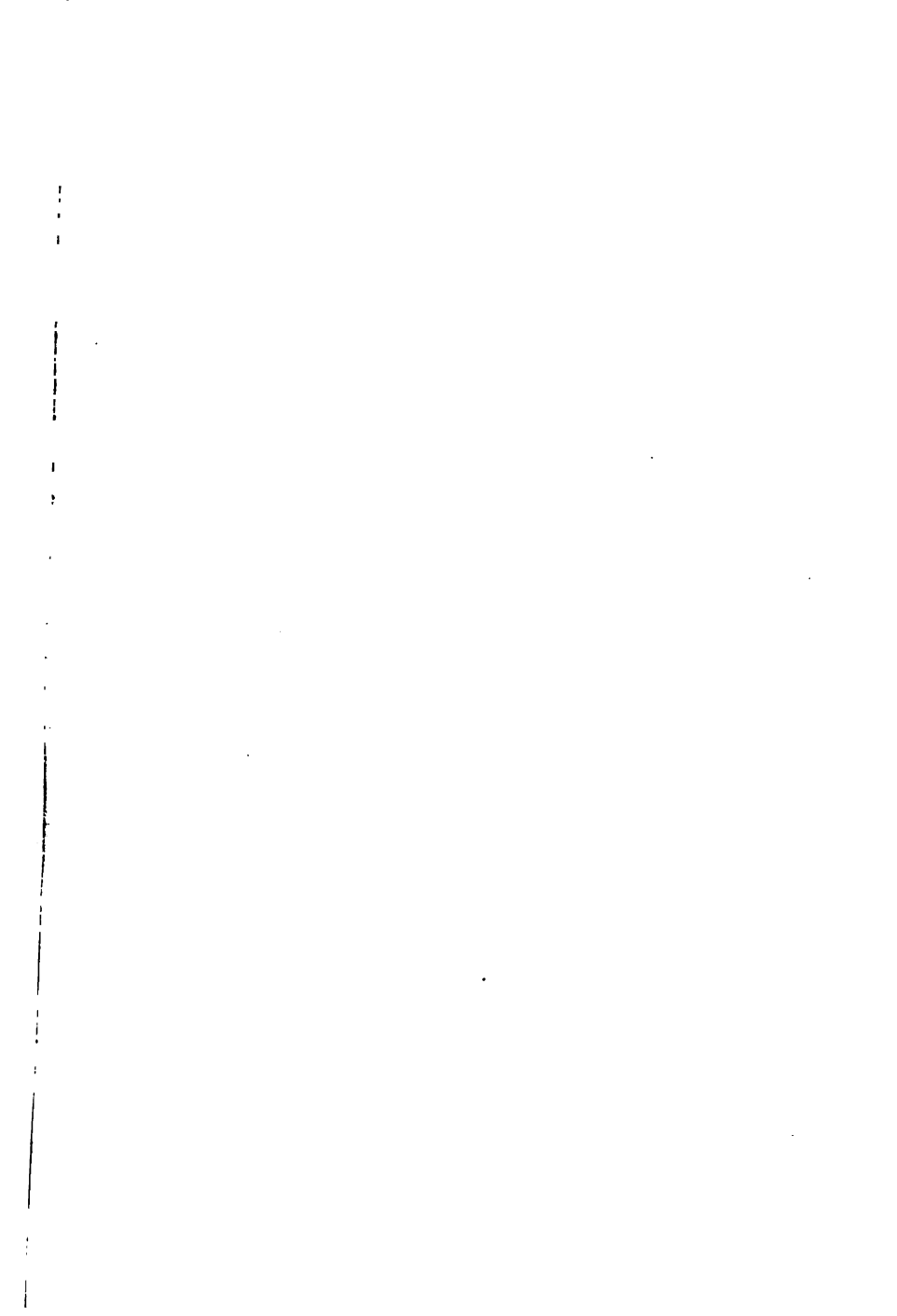


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STORM IN A TEACUP



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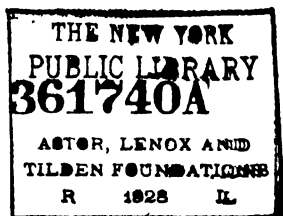
STORM IN A TEACUP

BY
EDEN PHILLPOTTS
Author of
"Old Delabole," "Brunel's Tower," etc.

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1919

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STORM IN A TEACUP

CHAPTER I

BOW CREEK

How musical are the place names on the tidal water of Dart. Tuckenhay and Greenway, Stoke Gabriel and Dittisham, Sharpham and Duncannon — a chime of bells to the native ear that knows them.

To-day autumn rainbows burnt low on the ferny hills and set their russet flashing. Then hailstorms churned the river into a flurry and swept seaward under a grey cowl. They came with a rush of wind, that brought scarlet leaves from the wild cherry and gold dust from the larch; but soon the air cleared and the sun returned, while the silver fret of the river's face grew calm again to mirror far-off things. Easterly the red earth arched low on the blue sky; west spread cobweb-grey orchards, their leaves fallen, their last of apples still twinkling — topaz and ruby — among the lichens of their ancient boughs. Then broad, oaken hangers met the beech scrub and the pale oak foliage was as a flame dancing above the red-hot fire of the beeches. Their conflagrations blazed along the tideway and their reflected colour poured down over the woods into the water.

Then elm trees rolled out along the river, and above them, in billows mightier than they, sailed the light-laden clouds, that seemed to lift another forest, bossed and rounded as the elm trees, and carry up their image into

the sky. But the cloud glory was pale, its sun touched summits faint against the ardour of the earthborn elms.

At water's brink, above Stoke Gabriel's little pier and gleam of white and rose-washed cots, black swine were rooting for acorns; while westerly an arm of Dart extended up Bow Creek through such sunlight as made the eyes throb and turn to the cool shadows. Another silver loop and Duncannon cuddled in an elbow of the river; then, higher yet, the hills heaved along Sharpham's hanging woods turned from the sun. The immense curtain of trees faced north in tapestry of temperate tones painted with purple and grey and the twilight colours of autumn foliage seen through shadows. The ash was already naked — a clean skeleton against the dun mass of dying foliage — and other trees were casting down their garments; but the firs and spruce made rich contrast of blue and green upon the sere.

Beyond Sharpham, long river flats rolled out, where plover and gulls sat on tussocks of reed, or rush, and curlew wheeled and mewed overhead. Then opened a point, where, robbed of colour, all mist-laden, amid gentle passages of receding banks and trees, there lifted the church tower of Totnes, with Dartmoor flung in a dim arc beyond.

So Dart came, beside old, fern-clad wharves, through sedge-beds and reed ronds to the end of her estuary under the glittering apron of a weir. Then the pulse of the sea ceased to beat; the tide bade farewell, and the salmon leapt from salt to fresh.

Worthy of worship in all her times and seasons; by her subtleties and sleights, her sun and shadow; by her laughter and coy approaches; by her curves and colours; her green hills and delight of woods and valleys; by her many voices; her changing moods and little lovelinesses, Dart is all Devon and so incomparably England.

A boat moved on Bow Creek, and in it there sat two men and a young woman. One man rowed while his wife

and the other man watched him. He pulled a long, powerful stroke, and the little vessel slipped up the estuary on a tide that was at flood, pondering a moment before the turn. The banks were a blaze of autumn colour, beneath which shelving planes of stone sank down to the water. The woman twirled an umbrella to dry it from the recent storm. She was cold and shivered a little, for though the sun shone again, the north wind blew.

"I'm fearing we oughtn't to have come, Medora," said the man who sat beside her.

"Take my coat," advised Medora's husband. "It's dry enough inside."

He stopped rowing, took off his coat and handed it to his wife, who slipped it over her white blouse, but did not thank him.

Medora Dingle was a dark-faced girl, with black hair and a pair of deep, brown eyes — lovely, but restless — under clean, arched eye-brows. Her mouth was red and small, her face fresh and rosy. She seemed self-conscious, and shivered a little more than was natural; for she was strong and hearty enough in body, tall and lithe, one who laboured six days a week and had never known sickness. Two of her fingers were tied up in cotton rags, and one of the wounds was on her ring finger so that her wedding ring was not visible.

Presently Edward Dingle put down the oars.

"Now you can take it on, old chap," he said, and then changed places with his companion. The men were very unlike, but each comely after his fashion. Dingle was the bigger — a broad-shouldered, loose-limbed youth of five-and-twenty, with a head rather small for his bulk, and a pleasant laughter-loving expression. He was fair and pretty rather than handsome. His features were regular, his eyes blue, his hair straw-coloured and curly. A small moustache did not conceal his good-humoured mouth. His voice was high-pitched, and he chattered a great deal of nothing. He was a type of the slight, kindly

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man taken for granted — a man whose worth is undervalued by reason of his unimportance to himself. He had a boundless good nature combined with a modest mind.

Jordan Kellock stood an inch or two shorter than Dingle and was a year or two older. He shaved clean, and brushed his dark, lustreless hair off his high forehead without parting it. Of a somewhat sallow complexion, with grey, deliberate eyes and a clean-cut, thin-lipped mouth, his brow suggested idealism and enthusiasm; there was a light in his solemn eyes and a touch of the sensitive about his nose. He spoke slowly, with a level, monotonous accent, and in this also offered an abrupt contrast to his companion.

It seemed that he felt the reality of life and was pervious to impressions. He rowed with less mannerism, and a slower stroke than his friend; but the boat moved faster than it had with Dingle at the oars, for Kellock was a very strong man, and his daily work had developed his breast and arms abnormally.

"A pity now," said Ned, "that you didn't let me fetch your thick coat, Medora, like I wanted to."

"You ought to have fetched it," she answered impatiently.

"I offered, and you said you didn't want it."

"That's like you. Throw the blame on me."

"There's no blame to it."

"You ought to have just brought the thing and not bothered me about it," she declared.

Then her husband laughed.

"So I ought," he admitted; "but it takes a man such a hell of a time to know just what he ought to do where a woman's concerned."

"Not where his wife's concerned, I should think."

"Hardest of all, I reckon."

"Yes, because a wife's truthful most times," replied Medora. "It's no good her pretending — there's nothing

to gain by it. Other women often pretend that a man's pleasing them, when he's not — just for politeness to the stupid things; but a man's wife's a fool to waste time like that. The sooner she trains her husband up to the truth of her, the better for him and the better for her."

They wrangled a little, then Ned laughed again.

"Now Jordan will let on you and me are quarrelling," he said.

Thus challenged, the rower answered, but he was quite serious in his reply.

"Last thing I should be likely to do — even if it was true. A man and his wife can argue a point without any feeling, of course."

"So they can," declared Medora. "And a proud woman don't let even a friend see her troubles. Not that I've got any troubles, I'm sure."

"And never will have, I hope," answered Kellock gravely.

The creek began to close, and ahead loomed a wharf and a building standing upon it. The hills grew higher round about, and the boat needed steering as her channel became narrower.

"Tide's turning," said Ned, and for answer, the rower quickened his stroke.

They passed the wharf, where a trout stream from a coomb ran into the estuary, then, ascending to the head of the boatable waters, reached their destination. Already the tide was falling and revealing weedy rocks and a high-water mark on either bank of the creek. To the right a little boathouse opened its dark mouth over the water, and now they slipped into it and came ashore.

Medora thanked Jordan Kellock warmly.

"Don't you think I didn't enjoy it because I got a bit chilly after the hailstorm," she said. "I did enjoy it ever so much, and it was very kind of you to ask me."

"The last time we'll go boating this year," he answered, "and it was a good day, though cold along of the

north wind. But the autumn woods were very fine, I'm sure."

"Properly lovely — poetry alive you might call them."

"So I thought," he answered as he turned down his sleeves and presently put on his coat and tie again. The coat was black and the tie a subdued green.

Ned made the boat ship-shape and turned to his wife.

"A good smart walk up the hill will warm you," he said.

She hesitated and whispered to him.

"Won't you ask Jordan to tea?"

"Why, certainly," he answered aloud. "Medora's wishful for you to come to tea, old man. So I hope you will."

"I should have liked to do it," replied Kellock; "but I've promised to see Mr. Trenchard. It's about the moulds for the advertisements."

"Right. He'll want me, too, I reckon over that job."

"He will without a doubt. In fact it's more up to you than me. Everything depends on the pulp."

"So it does with all paper," declared Ned.

"True enough. The beaterman's master. For these fancy pictures for exhibition you've got to mix stuff as fine as clear soup — just the contrary of what you may call real paper."

"Are you coming, Ned?" asked Medora. "I've got to get over to mother to-morrow and I don't want to go with a cold."

"Coming, coming," he said. "So long, Jordan."

"Good-bye till Monday," answered the other. Then he stood still and watched the young couple tramp off together.

He gazed thoughtfully and when they disappeared up a steep woodland path, he shook his head. They were gone to Ashprington village, where they dwelt; but Mr. Kellock lived at Dene where the trout stream descended from the hills to the river. He crossed from the boat-

house by a row of stepping-stones set athwart the creek; then he turned to the left and soon found himself at the cottage where he lodged.

This man and Dingle had both loved Medora Trivett, and for some time she had hesitated between them. But Ned won her and the loser, taking his defeat in a large and patient spirit, continued to remain good friends with both.

Mr. Kellock knew, what everybody guessed, that after a year of marriage, the pair were not happy together, though why this should be so none could at present determine.

CHAPTER II

MAGIC PICTURES

STOPPING only to wash his hands and brush his hair, Kellock left his rooms and hastened up the coomb, where towered immense congeries of buildings under the slope of the hills. Evening sunshine fell over the western height which crowned the valley, and still caught the upper windows of the factory; but the huge shadow quickly climbed upward as the sun set.

A small house stood at the main gate of Dene Paper Mill, and at the door sat a man reading a paper and smoking his pipe.

It was Mr. Trood, foreman of the works.

"Guvnor's asking for you, Kellock," he said. "Five o'clock was the time."

Jordan hurried on to the deserted mills, for the day was Saturday and work had ceased at noon. Threading the silent shops he presently reached a door on an upper floor, marked "Office," knocked and was told to enter.

On the left of the chamber sat a broad-shouldered man writing at a roll-top desk; under the windows of the room, which faced north, extended a long table heaped with paper of all descriptions and colours.

The master twisted round on his office chair, then rose and lighted a cigarette. He was clean-shaved with iron-grey hair and a searching but genial expression. His face shone with intelligence and humour. It was strong and accurately declared the man, for indomitable perseverance and courage belonged to Matthew Trenchard.

His own success he attributed to love of sport and love

of fun. These pursuits made him sympathetic and understanding. He recognised his responsibilities and his rule of conduct in his relations with the hundred men and women he employed was to keep in closest possible touch with them. He held it good for them and vital for himself that he should know what was passing in their minds; for only thus could he discover the beginning of grievances and destroy them in the egg. He believed that the longer a trouble grew, the more difficult it was to dissipate, and by establishing intimate relations with his staff and impressing upon them his own situation, his successes and his failures, he succeeded in fixing unusual bonds.

For the most part his people felt that Trenchard's good was their own — not because he said so, but because he made it so; and save for certain inevitable spirits, who objected on principle to all existing conditions between capital and labour, the workers trusted him and spoke well of him.

Kellock was first vatman at Dene, and one of the best paper makers in England. Both knew their worth and each was satisfied with the other.

"I've heard from that South American Republic, Kellock," said Mr. Trenchard. "They like the new currency paper and the colour suits them."

"It's a very fine paper, Mr. Trenchard."

"Just the exact opposite of what I'm after for these advertisements. The public, Kellock, must be appealed to by the methods of Cheap Jack at the fair. They love a conjuring trick, and if you can stop them long enough to ask 'how's it done?' you often interest them and win them. Now samples of our great papers mean nothing to anybody but the dealers. The public doesn't know hand-made paper from machine-made. What we've got to do is to show them — not tip-top paper, but a bit of magic; and such a fool is the public that when he sees these pictures in water-mark, he'll think the paper that produces them must be out of the common good. We know

that it's not 'paper' at all in our sense, and that it's a special brew for this special purpose; but the public, amazed by the pictures, buys our paper and doesn't know that the better the paper, the more impossible such sleight of hand would be upon it. We show them one thing which awakes their highest admiration and causes them to buy another!"

All this Jordan Kellock very well understood, and his master knew that he did; but Trenchard liked to talk and excelled in lucid exposition.

"That's right," said the vatman; "they think that the paper that can take such pictures must be good for anything; though the truth is that it's good for nothing — but the pictures. If there was any quality to the pulp, it could never run into such moulds as these were made in."

He began to pick up the impressions of a series of large, exhibition water-marks, and hold them to the windows, that their transparent wonders might be seen.

"Real works of art," he said, "with high lights and deep shadows and rare half tones and colour, too, all on stuff like tissue. The beaterman must give me pulp as fine as flour to get such impressions."

"Finer than flour, my lad. The new moulds are even more wonderful. It is no good doing what your father did over again. My father beat my grandfather; so it's my duty to beat him — see?"

"These are wonderful enough in all conscience."

"And for the Exhibition I mean to turn out something more wonderful still. Something more than craft — real art, my friend. I want the artists. I want them to see what our art paper for water-colour work is. They don't know yet — at least only a handful of them."

"But this is different. The pulp to do this sort of thing must be as thin as water," said Kellock.

"Fibre is the first consideration for paper that's going to be as everlasting as parchment; but these water-mark masterpieces are *tours de force* — conjuring tricks as I

call them. And I want to give the public a conjuring trick more wonderful than they've ever seen in paper before; and I'm going to do it."

"No paper maker ever beat these, Mr. Trenchard," declared Kellock. He held up large sheets of the size known as "elephant." They appeared to be white until illuminated; then they revealed shades of delicate duck-green, sunrise yellow, dark blue, light blue and umber.

A portrait by Romney of Lady Hamilton shone through the first, and the solidity of the dark masses, the rendering of the fabric and the luminous quality of the flesh were wonderfully translated by the daylight filtering through.

"There can be no painted pictures like these," said Matthew Trenchard stoutly. "And why? Because the painter uses paint; I use pure daylight, and the sweetest paint that ever was isn't a patch on the light of day. Such things as these are more beautiful than pictures, just because the living light from the sky is more beautiful than any pigment made by man."

Kellock was too cautious to agree with these revolutionary theories.

"Certainly these things would be very fine to decorate our windows, if we didn't want to look out of them," he admitted.

Then he held up a portrait of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria.

"Pure ultramarine blue, you see," commented the master, "and the light brings out its richness, though if you looked at the paper, you'd be puzzled to find any blue in it. That's because the infinitely fine atoms of the colour would want a microscope to see their separate particles. Yet where the pulp sank to the depths of the mould, they collected in millions to give you those deep shadows."

Kellock delayed at the copy of a statue: the Venus Victrix from Naples — a work which certainly reproduced the majesty of the original in a rounded, lustrous fashion that no reproduction on the flat could echo.

"We can't beat that, though it is fifty years old," declared Kellock.

"We're going to, however; and another statue is my idea. Marble comes out grandly as you see. I'm out for black and white, not colour. I've an idea we can get something as fine as the old masters of engraving, and finer."

"The vatman is nought for this work," confessed Kellock. "He makes paper in his mould and that's all there is to it — whether for printing, or writing, or painting. The man who matters is him who makes the mould."

"But we can help him; we can experiment at the vat and in the beating engine. We can go one better in the pulp; and the stroke counts at the vat. I reckon your stroke will be invaluable to work the pulp into every cranny of such moulds as I'm thinking about."

"I'll do my best; so will Dingle; but how many men in England are there who could make such moulds as these to-day?"

"Three," replied Trenchard. "But I want better moulds. I'm hopeful that Michael Thorn of London will rise to it. I go to see him next week, and we put in a morning at the British Museum to find a statue worthy of the occasion."

"I can see a wonderful thing in my mind's eye already," declared Kellock.

"Can you? Well, I never can see anything in my mind's eye and rest content for an hour, till I set about the way to see it with my body's eye."

"We all know that, Mr. Trenchard."

"Here's my favourite," declared the other, holding up a massive head of Abraham Lincoln. "Now that's a great work in my judgment and if we beat that in quality, we shall produce a water-mark picture worth talking about."

"You ought to show all these too," said Jordan Kellock.

"I shall — if I beat them; not if they beat me," replied

the other. "I wanted you to see what my father and grandfather could do, so that you may judge what we're up against. But they're going to be beaten at Dene, or else I'll know the reason why."

"It's good to see such things and worth while trying to beat them," answered the vatman.

"To improve upon the past is the business of every honest man in my opinion," declared Trenchard. "That's what we're here for; and that's what I've done, I believe, thanks to a lot of clever people here who have helped me to do it and share what credit there may be. But I don't claim credit, Ned. It's common duty for every man with brains in his head to help push the craft along."

"And keep its head above water," added the listener.

Matthew Trenchard eyed him doubtfully and lighted another cigarette.

"Yes," he admitted rather reluctantly. "You're right. Hand-made paper's battling for its life in one sense — like a good many other hand-made things. But the machine hasn't caught us yet and it will be a devil of a long time before it does, I hope."

"It's for us not to let it," said Jordan — a sentiment the paper master approved.

"I'm fair," he said, "and I'm not going to pretend the machine isn't turning out some properly wonderful papers; and I'm not going to say it isn't doing far better things than ever I thought it would do. I don't laugh at it as my grandfather did, or shake my head at it as my father used. I recognise our craft is going down hill. But we ain't at the bottom by a long way; and when we get there, we'll go game and die like gentlemen."

They talked awhile longer; then the dusk came down, Kellock departed and Trenchard, turning on an electric light, resumed his writing.

CHAPTER III

PRIORY FARM

FROM Dene a mighty hill climbs southward to Cornworthy village. "The Corkscrew" it is called, and men merciful to their beasts choose a longer and more gradual ascent. But not a few of the workers engaged at the paper mill tramped this zig-zag steep six days out of every seven, and among these Lydia Trivett, the mother of Medora, could boast twenty years of regular perambulation. Only on rare occasions, when "Corkscrew" was coated with ice, did she take the long detour by the little lake above the works.

She had lived at Ashprington until her husband died; then she and her daughter came to live with her brother, Thomas Dolbear, of Priory Farm. He was a bachelor then; but at forty he wedded; and now Medora had her own home, while her mother still dwelt with Mr. Dolbear, his wife, Mary, and their increasing family.

Lydia was a little brisk woman of fifty — the mistress of the rag house at the mills. She was still comely and trim, for hard work agreed with her. A very feminine air marked her, and Medora had won her good looks from her mother, though not her affectation, for Mrs. Trivett was a straightforward and unassuming soul. She had much to pride herself upon, but never claimed credit in any direction.

Priory Farm stood under a great slope of orchard and meadow, upon the crown of which the priory ruins ascended. The farm was at the bottom of a hill, and immediately opposite climbed the solitary street of Cornworthy village capped by the church. The church and the old

Cistercean ruin looked across the dip in the land at each other.

Now, on Sunday afternoon, Lydia, at the garden gate of her brother's house, started off six children to Sunday school. Five were girls and one was a boy. They ranged from twelve years old to three; while at home a two year old baby — another girl — remained with her mother. Mary Dolbear expected her tenth child during the coming spring. Two had died in infancy. She was an inert, genial mass of a woman, who lived only for her children and the business of maternity. Her husband worshipped her and they increased and multiplied proudly. Their house, but for Lydia's sleepless ministrations, would have been a pigstye. They were indifferent to dirt and chose to make all things subservient to the demands of their children.

"The cradle rules the world, so enough said," was Tom Dolbear's argument when people protested at the chaos in which he lived. He was a stout man with a fat, boyish face, scanty, sandy hair and a narrow forehead, always wrinkled by reason of the weakness of his eyes. He had a smile like a baby and was indeed a very childish man; but he knew his business and made his farm suffice for his family needs.

In this house Lydia's own room was an oasis in a wilderness. There one found calm, order, cleanliness, distinction. She trusted nobody in it but herself and always locked the door when she left for work.

It was regarded as a sacred room, for both Mary and her husband revered Lydia and blessed the Providence that had sent her to them. They treated her with the greatest respect, always gave way to her and recognised very acutely the vital force she represented in the inert and sprawling domesticity of their establishment. Once, when an idea was whispered that Tom's sister might leave him, Mary fell absolutely ill and refused to eat and drink until she changed her mind and promised to stay.

To do them justice they never took Lydia for granted. Their gratitude flowed in a steady stream. They gave her all credit and all admiration, and went their philoprogenitive way with light hearts.

Now Mrs. Trivett watched her nieces and nephew march together in their Sunday best along the way to Sunday school. Then she was about to shut the wicket and return up the garden path, when a man appeared on the high road and a fellow worker at the Mill accosted her.

Nicholas Pinhey was a finisher; that is to say the paper passed through his hands last before it left the works. With the multifarious processes of its creation he had nothing to do; but every finished sheet and stack of sheets touched his fingers before it entered the world, and he was well skilled in the exacting duties of his own department.

He was a thin, prim bachelor of sixty — a man of nice habits and finicking mind. There was much of the old maid in him, too, and he gossiped inordinately, but never unkindly. He knew the life history, family interests and private ambitions of everybody in the Mill. He smelt mystery where none existed and much feared the modern movements and threats of labour. Especially was he doubtful of Jordan Kellock and regarded him as a dangerous and too progressive spirit.

His interest in other people's affairs now appeared; for he had come to see Lydia; he had climbed "The Corkscrew" on Sunday from most altruistic motives.

"The better the day the better the deed," he said. "I've walked over for a cup of tea and a talk, because a little bird's told me something I don't much like, Mrs. Trivett, and it concerns you in a manner of speaking."

"You always keep to the point, Mr. Pinhey; and I dare say I know what the point is for that matter. Come in. We can talk very well, because we shall be alone in a minute."

Nicholas followed her into the parlour, a room of good size on the left hand side of the entrance. They surprised

Mrs. Dolbear nodding beside the fire. She liked Mr. Pinhey, but she was glad of the excuse to leave them and retire to her own room.

She shook hands with the visitor, who hoped she found herself as well as could be expected.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I take these things from whence they come. I feel no fear except in one particular."

"I won't believe it," he declared. "You've got the courage to fight lions and the faith to move mountains. We all know that. If the women in general would come to the business of the next generation with your fearless nature, we might hear less about the decrease of the population."

"It's not my part I trouble about; it's the Lord's," explained Mrs. Dolbear. "If I have another girl, it'll break Tom's heart. Six maids and one boy is the record so far, though of the two we've buried, one was a boy. And such is my perfect trust in myself, if I could choose what I want from the Almighty at this moment, it would be two men children."

"Magnificent!" said Mr. Pinhey.

"I take Lydia to witness I speak no more than the truth," replied the matron. "But these things are out of our keeping, though Tom read in a paper some time since a remarkable verdict, that if a woman with child ate enough green stuff, she might count on a boy."

"That's a painful subject," said Lydia, "and you'd better not talk about it, Polly."

"It was painful at the time," admitted Mrs. Dolbear, "because Tom's one of they hopeful men, who will always jump at a new thing like a trout jumps at a fly. And what was the result? From the moment he hit on that cussed paper, he fed me more like a cow than a creature with a soul. 'Twas green stuff morning, noon and night — lettuce and spinach — which I hate any time — and broccoli and turnip tops and spring onions and cauliflower and Lord knows what mess till I rebelled and defied the

man. I didn't lose my temper; but I said, calm and slow, 'Tom,' I said, 'if you don't want me to be brought to a bed of cabbage next September, stop it. God's my judge,' I said, 'I won't let down another herb of the field. I want red meat,' I told him, 'or else I won't be responsible.' He argued for it, but I had my way and Lydia upheld me."

"And what was the result in the family line if I may venture to ask?" inquired Mr. Pinhey.

"The result in the family line was Jane Ethel," answered Mrs. Dolbear; "and where is Jane Ethel now, Lydia?"

"In her little grave," answered Mrs. Trivett.

Her sister-in-law immediately began to weep.

"Don't you cry, my dear, it wasn't your fault. The poor baby was born with death in her eyes, as I always said."

Mrs. Dolbear sighed and moved ponderously across the room. She was short and broad with a touzled head of golden hair and a colourless face. But her smile was beautiful and her teeth perfect.

"I dare say you'll want to talk before tea," she suggested; "and I'll go and have a bit of a sleep. I always say, 'where there's sleep, there's hope.' And I want more than most people, and I can take it any time in the twenty-four hours of the clock."

She waddled away and Mrs. Trivett explained.

"Polly's a proper wonder for sleep. It's grown into a habit. She'll call out for a nap at the most unseasonable moments. She'll curl up anywhere and go off. We shan't see her again till supper I shouldn't wonder. Sit you down and tell me what you come for."

"The work you must do in this house!" said Mr. Pinhey.

"I like work and this is my home."

"A home I suppose, but not what I should call an abiding place," hazarded the man.

"I don't want no abiding place, because we know, if we're Christians, that there's no abiding place this side of the grave."

"You take it in your usual high spirit. And now — you'll forgive me if I'm personal, Mrs. Trivett. You know the man that speaks."

"You want to better something I'm sure, else you wouldn't be here."

"It is just as you say: I want to better something. We bachelors look out on life from our lonely towers, so to say, and we get a bird's eye view of the people; and if we see a thing not all it might be, 'tis our duty in my opinion to try and set it right. And to be quite frank and in all friendship, I'm very much afraid your Medora and her husband ain't heart and soul together as they should be. If I'm wrong, then thank God and enough said. But am I wrong?"

Mrs. Trivett considered some moments before answering. Then she replied:

"No, Nicholas Pinhey, you're not wrong, and I wish I could say you were. You have seen what's true; but I wouldn't say the mischief was deep yet. It may be in our power to nip it in the bud."

"You grant it's true, and that excuses me for touching it. I know my manners I hope, and to anybody else I wouldn't have come; but you're different, and if I can prevail upon you to handle Medora, I shall feel I have done all I can do, or have a right to do. In these delicate cases, the thing is to know where the fault lies. And most times it's with the man, no doubt."

"I don't know about that. It isn't this time anyway."

Mr. Pinhey was astonished.

"Would you mean to say you see your own daughter unfavourable?" he asked.

"You must know the right of a thing if you want to do any good," declared Lydia. "Half the failure to right wrong so far as I can see, is owing to a muddled view of

what the wrong is. I've hung back about this till I could see it clear, and I won't say I do see it clear yet."

"I speak as a bachelor," repeated Mr. Pinhey, "and therefore with reserve and caution. And if you — the mother of one of the parties — don't feel you can safely take a hand, it certainly isn't for anybody else to try."

"As a matter of fact, I was going to do something this very day. My daughter's coming to tea and I mean to ask her what the matter is. She's not prone to be exactly straight, is Medora, but seeing I want nothing but her good, I hope she'll be frank with me."

The man felt mildly surprised to hear a mother criticise her daughter so frankly.

"I thought a child could do no wrong in its parents' eyes," he said.

"Depends on the parent, Mr. Pinhey. If you want to help your child, 'tis no use beginning by taking that line. If we can do wrong, as God knows we can, so can our children, and it's a vain sort of love to suppose they're perfect. Medora's got a great many good qualities, but, like other pretty girls, she's handicapped here and there. A right down pretty girl don't know she's born most times, because everybody in trousers bows down before her and helps to shut reality out of her life."

"It's the same with money," surmised Nicholas. "Let a young person have money and they look at the world through tinted glasses. The truth's hidden from them, and some such go to their graves and never know truth, while others, owing to chance, lose the stuff that stands between them and reality and have a very painful wakening. But as to beauty — you was a woman to the full as fair as your girl — yet look how you weathered the storm."

"No," answered Lydia, "I never had Medora's looks. In her case life's been too smooth and easy if anything. She had a comfortable home with Tom here after her father died; and then came along a choice of two good men

to wed her and the admiration of a dozen others. She was in two minds between Kellock and Dingle for a while; but her luck held and she took the right one."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes — for Medora. That's not to say that Jordan Kellock isn't a cleverer chap than my son-in-law. Of course he is. He's got more mind and more sight. He has ideas about labour and a great gift of determination; and he's ambitious. He'll go a long way further than Ned. But against that you can set Ned's unshakable good temper and light heart. It's grander for a man to have a heavy heart than a light, when he looks out at the world; but they heavy-hearted, earnest men, who want to help to set life right, call for a different fashion of wife from Medora. If such men wed, they should seek women in their own pattern — the earnest — deadly earnest sort — who don't think of themselves, or their clothes, or their looks, or their comforts. They should find their help-mates in a kind of female that's rare still, though they grow commoner. And Medora ain't that sort, and if she'd took Kellock she'd have been no great use to him and he'd have been no lasting use to her."

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Pinhey, "how you look into things."

"Ned's all right," continued Mrs. Trivett. "He's all right, for Medora; and she ought to be all right for him. He loves her with all his heart and, in a word, she doesn't know her luck. That's what I must try and show her if I can. It's just a sort of general discontent about nothing in particular. You can't have it both ways. Ned's easy and likes a bit of fun. He's a good workman — in fact above the average, or he wouldn't be where he is. As a beaterman you won't find his better in any paper mill; but it ends there. He does his work and he's reached his limit. And away from work, he's just a schoolboy from his task. He's light hearted and ought to be happy; and if she is not, he'll worry a great deal. But he won't

know what's the matter, any more than Medora herself."

Mr. Pinhey's conventional mind proceeded in its natural groove.

"To say it delicately, perhaps if a child was to come along it would smooth out the crumpled rose-leaves," he suggested.

"You might think so; but it isn't that. They both agree there. They don't like children and don't want them."

"Well, I should be the last to blame them, I'm sure. It may not be true to nature, but it's true to truth, that the young married couples ain't so keen about families as they used to be."

"Nature's at odds with a good deal we do," answered Lydia. "Time was when a quiver full of young ones seemed good to the people. But education has changed all that. There's selfishness in shirking a family no doubt; but there's also sense. And the better the education grows, the shorter the families will."

They talked on until Medora herself arrived and the children came back from Sunday school. Then Mrs. Trivett and a maid prepared the tea and Mr. Pinhey, against his inclination, shared the meal. He noticed that Medora was kind to the little ones, but not enthusiastic about them. His own instincts made him shrink before so much happy and hungry youth feeding heartily. The children scattered crumbs and seemed to create an atmosphere of jam and a general stickiness around them. They also made a great deal of noise.

Their mother did not appear and when Nicholas asked for their father, the eldest daughter told him that Mr. Dolbear was gone out for the day with his dogs and a ferret.

He whispered under his breath, "Ferreting on the Sabbath!"

After tea he took leave and returned home. Then Medora and her mother went into the orchard with the chil-

dren, and Mrs. Trivett, wasting no words, asked her daughter what was vexing her.

"Say as much or as little as you please, my dear — nothing if I can't help you. But perhaps I can. It looks as though everybody but Ned sees there's something on your mind. Can't you tell me what it is — or better still, tell him?"

Medora flushed.

"There's nothing the matter that can be helped," she said. "Ned can't help being himself, I suppose, and if anybody's talking, they ought to be ashamed. It's a cowardly, mean thing."

"It's not cowardly, or mean to want to put a wrong right and make people better content. But nobody wants to interfere between husband and wife, and the people are very fond of you both as you well know. You say 'Ned can't help being himself.' Begin there, then. You've been married a year now and you didn't marry in haste either. He was what he is before you took him. He hasn't changed."

"I didn't think he was such a fool, if you must know," said Medora.

"What d'you mean by a fool?"

"Simple — like a dog. There's nothing to Ned. Other men have character and secrets and a bit up their sleeve. They count, and people know they ain't seeing the inside of them. Ned's got no inside. He's a boy. I thought I'd married a man and I've married a great boy. I'm only telling you this, mind. I'm a good wife enough; but I'm not a brainless one and I can't help comparing my husband to other men."

"You always compare everything you've got to what others have got," answered Lydia. "When you was a tiny child, you'd love your toys till you saw the toys of other children. Then you'd grow discontent. At school, if you took a prize, it was poisoned, because some other girl had got a prettier book than you; and everybody

else's garden was nicer than ours; and everybody else had better furniture in their houses and better pictures on their walls and better clothes on their backs. And now it's your husband that isn't in it with other people's husbands. Perhaps you'll tell me, Medora, what husbands round about can beat Ned for sense and cheerfulness and an easy mind and the other things that go to make a home comfortable."

"Everybody isn't married," answered Medora. "I don't look round and compare Ned to other husbands. I've got something better to do. But I can't help seeing with all his good nature and the rest of it that he's a slight man — not a sort for woman to repose upon as something with quicker wits — stronger, more masterful than herself."

"Like who?" asked Mrs. Trivett.

"Well — I'm only speaking to you, mother — take yesterday. Jordan Kellock asked us to go for a row in the gamekeeper's boat and see the river — me and Ned. And we went; and how could I help seeing that Jordan had the brains? Nothing he said, for he's a good friend and above smallness; but while Ned chattered and laughed and made a noise, there was Jordan, pleasant and all that; but you felt behind was strength of character and a mind working and thinking more than it said; while my husband was saying more than he thinks. And I hate to hear him chatter and then, when he's challenged, climb down and say he sees he was wrong."

"You've got to take the rough with the smooth in human nature, Medora. And it's a bit staggering to hear you mention Kellock, of all men, seeing the circumstances. If you feel like that, why didn't you take Kellock when you could?"

Medora's reply caused her mother consternation.

"God knows why I didn't," she said.

The elder gave a little gasp and did not answer.

"It's wrong when you have to correct your husband

in front of another man," continued Medora; "but I've got my self respect I believe — so far — and I won't let Ned say foolish things before people and let others think I'm agreeing with him. And if I've spoken sharp when men or women at the works heard me, Ned's got himself to thank for it. Anyway Jordan knows I'm not without brains, and I'm not going to pretend I am. I laughed at Ned in the boat yesterday, and he said after that he didn't mind my laughing at him, but he wouldn't have it before people."

Mrs. Trivett left the main issue as a subject too big for the moment.

"You ought not to laugh at him before Mr. Kellock," she said; "because he's one of them serious-minded men who don't understand laughter. I've seen a man say things in a light mood that had no sting in them really, yet one of the humourless sort, listening, didn't see it was said for fun, and reported it after and made trouble. Kellock's a solemn man and would misread it if you scored off Ned, or said some flashy thing that meant nought in truth. You know what I mean."

They had strolled to the top of the orchard now, where the children were playing in the Priory ruin. And here at dusk they parted.

"We'll leave it till we can have another talk," said Lydia; "seemingly there's more to talk about than I thought. Be patient as well as proud, Medora. And don't feel so troubled about Ned that you haven't got no spare time to look into your own heart and see if you're satisfied with yourself. Because very often in my experience, when we're seeing misfortune and blaming other people, if we look at home, we'll find the source of the trouble lies with ourselves and not them."

CHAPTER IV

A NEW VATMAN

A MAN stood on the crown of a limestone quarry, where it bit into the slope of a green hill. Perched here, three hundred feet above the valley bottom, a varied scene spread round about, but he was only concerned with the other side of the coomb and the great pile of Dene Paper Mill that stood over against him.

On his left opened the creek heavily fringed with trees. Mud banks oozed out upon it and the river channel twinkled in the midst of them. The beholder saw that the sea ascended to this rural scene, bringing its weeds and shells to the little beaches and its birds to the air. From this inlet, the great valley broke and pointed west. It expanded and widened among such rolling green steepes as that upon which the stranger stood, and the heights were capped at the skyline, here by clumps of Scotch fir; here, by spinneys of oak and elm; here, by arable or pasture. Rows of small houses lay among the orchards in the bottom, where a stream wound, and the methodical ordering of those tenements marked a sharp contrast with the irregular and older cottages round them. They were the homes of busy people drawn hither for one purpose, and above them towered the great hive wherein they worked. The Mill spread under a knoll of trees on the hillside and shone out grey and blue against the autumn colour of the hanging woods behind it.

Wide roofs glittered with glass and the northern face rose finely with tier on tier of windows outlined in red brick. Lesser buildings supported the mass to right and left and a clock-tower and weather-vane surmounted the

whole. The architectural form, piled without design through the accretion of years, had yet taken a dignified and significant completeness. It was stern and plain, but not ugly and meaningless. Its shape, with outstretched wings and uplifted turret, like a head, suggested a sentient organism that could well fight for itself and protect its interests. It seemed not aggressive, but watchful; no tyrant to destroy, but a potent, receptive and benevolent over-lord of the green valley, which it had indeed modified and awakened, but not robbed of its distinction and beauty.

The building must have been imposing on a plain, but the hills rolling round about tended to dwarf its size by their immense contours. Under some lights indeed the Mill bulked greater than the surrounding scene and to the meditative mind far transcended the inert matter heaved and heaped around it; but to-day Nature was clad in glory and no building built with hands could compete against her splendour of blue sky, emerald green grass lands and autumn groves of beech and oak. Seen in this brilliant setting Dene Mill was an impression of restrained grey and silver. Broad lights and shadows brooded over it and sunshine found the roofs but not the face of the buildings. Yet no sobriety marked the mass. It never brooded or sulked, unless the sky lowered and dropped darkness upon it. There was joy in the feathers of steam that leapt, and laughter in the broad golden weather-vane above the clock-tower. Labour pursued in this rural valley seemed to offer some hope of lessened asperity. Eyes weary with work might lift to the windows and mirror green and gracious things — meadows climbing and orchards and thatched roofs; or shorn stubbles spreading like cloth of gold upon the shoulders of the eastern hills.

The beholder marked the people moving about the many mouths of the great hive beneath him, and being a man apt to link impressions, he guessed that the Mill had been built of the stone from the quarry that gaped at his feet. The

rift in the hill extended to a road at the valley bottom, then sprang trees to fill the space between, so that the works beyond seemed bowered in foliage on all sides and framed in thinning boughs.

A bell rang and the people streamed away — men and women — in a little thin trickle, like beads irregularly scattered on a thread. Here and there the line was brightened by a flash of colour from a bright sun bonnet, or gown. The watcher descended now, gained the road below, then climbed the other side to the Mill.

He was a middle-aged, good-looking man, with a round face, hair turning grey, and black, rather shifty eyes. Humour homed on his countenance and merriment and cunning shared his expression. He carried a large, brown paper bundle and wore a new, homespun suit, a paper collar, a sky-blue tie and a cloth cap.

As he passed Mr. Trood's house at the entrance of the works and proceeded towards them, looking round about him, there emerged the master, and the new-comer guessed that he was so.

He touched his hat therefore and said:

"You'll be the boss, I reckon."

"Right — and what do you want?"

"Work, Mr. Matthew Trenchard."

It was not strange to see a wandering paper maker. The body of these men is small; they know their own value and, being always precious, can count upon making a change with safety. They are sought and a first rate workman need be in no fear of not winning a welcome where hand paper continues to be manufactured.

"What department?" asked Trenchard.

"A vatman, if so be you're wanting a good one."

"I'm always wanting a good vatman. We've got three of the best in England here."

"Take me and you'll have four," said the man.

Trenchard laughed and looked at him.

"Why are you changing?" he asked.

"Tired of a town. I come from the midlands; but I want to be in the country, and knowing about Dene Works, I thought I'd come down and offer."

They were standing opposite Mr. Trood's house at the main gate and the master turned and knocked at the door. Trood himself appeared.

"A vatman," said Trenchard.

"By name, Philander Knox," explained the stranger. "I must tell you," he added, "that I've got rather a queer stroke at the vat. People laugh to see me with a mould; but they don't laugh when they see the paper."

"We shan't quarrel with your stroke if we don't with your sheet," said Trood. "I'm for a nice, easy stroke myself, because it goes farther and faster; but we all know no two men have the same stroke. We've got a man now with a stroke like a cow with a musket; but his paper's all right."

"You can come for a week on trial," declared Trenchard. "Begin to-morrow if you're agreeable to terms. We're very busy. This is Mr. Trood, our foreman."

He went homewards and left the others together, while Mr. Knox produced his credentials.

CHAPTER V

THE RAG HOUSE

THE place where Lydia Trivett worked and controlled the activities of twenty other women was a lofty, raftered hall lighted from the north by a row of windows under which the sorters sat. In the midst of the chamber the material was piled in huge, square bales covered with sacking. The parcels came from all parts of Europe, where linen and cotton rag could be obtained; and before they were handled, the contents entered a thresher for preliminary dusting. The thresher throbbed and thundered within a compartment boarded off from the workshop. Here in a great wooden case, a roller with iron-shod teeth revolved, while above this lower, moving wheel, fixed prongs stood similarly armed, so that their teeth passed between each other at every turn. Here spun the rags and whirled and tossed, while the dust of France, Belgium, England, Ireland, Scotland was sucked away from them. Every rag that entered Dene Mill was subjected to this rough initial embrace, where Alice Barefoot, a tall, strong woman, attended the thresher. She was herself of the colour of dust, with a high complexion and lion-coloured hair, tied up in a yellow kerchief. She prided herself on doing man's work and, indeed, accomplished her heavy labours very completely. The dusted rag she piled in tall baskets, stopped the thresher, then opened the door of the chamber and bore the rag out to the sorters. They sat each before her lattice with the material heaped at her left. The practised workers dealt very swiftly with the stuff, running it between their hands and knowing its composition by touch. Wool or silk sometimes intruded, but was flung

aside, for only cotton passed to the empty baskets at each woman's right. The workers were clad in white overalls and their heads were covered with white caps and bonnets. Wonderful cleanliness marked them and the atmosphere of the brightly lighted shop was clear despite the flocculent material that passed through it.

For purity of air and water, chemicals and working hands is a vital matter to the paper maker. Every operation must needs be as cleanly as sleepless precaution can make it.

From the mountain of rags on her left the sorter plucked material and picked it over the lattice, an open wire-work sieve spread before her. Standing beside it was a short upright knife used to cut the rags and sever from them the buttons, hooks and eyes, whalebones and other extraneous additions that had belonged to their earlier incarnations. These knives were made from old steel scythes worn too thin for husbandry, but here answering a final purpose of value. The hones hummed from time to time, for the busy knives needed constant sharpening. Their cutting edge turned away from the workwoman and to it she brought the material — fragments of every garment ever manufactured from spun cotton.

The history of many a single rag had been a feminine epic, from its plucking in a far off cotton field to its creation, use, adventures, triumphs, tragedies and final dissolution. Here they were from the dust heaps of a continent, from the embracing of bodies noble and simple, high and low, young and old, sweet and foul.

Their tags and buttons were swiftly cut away and each grille exhibited a strange assortment of trophies — pearl and glass, metal and foil, whalebone and indiarubber. Even so many foreign substances escaped the sorters, to be captured at a later period in the purification of the rag.

The women sat back to back and there was little speech among them. Their hands twinkled in a sort of rhythmic measure from right to left and left to right. Then, as

their baskets were filled, came Alice Barefoot to carry them away and pile fresh accumulations from the thresher.

To-day the work was old rag; but sometimes a consignment of fragments and overplus from the collar and shirt factories arrived clean and white. Out of them had garments been cut and the remnants needed nothing but shortening and dismemberment upon the knives and picking over for coloured threads, or rubbish that hang about them.

Here reigned Lydia and herself worked at a lattice with the rest. She had only come to the Mill when her husband died; but her skill proved great and her influence greater. Blind-folded she could have done her sorting and separated by touch the cotton, or linen, from any other textile fabric. She was clad in a big white garment and had wrapped her head and neck in a pale blue handkerchief so that her face only appeared.

Next to her sat a girl, and sometimes they spoke.

Daisy Finch was a big blonde maiden, a friend of Medora's; and concerning Medora the pair kept up a fitful conversation. But Lydia's eyes were about her while her hands swiftly ran through the rags. She marked all that was going on from her place at the end of the row, and sometimes cried out a direction, or word of admonition.

"She don't tell me nothing," said Daisy. "She just leaves you with a sort of general feeling she ain't happy, then she'll turn it off and say, 'talk of something else,' though all the time we haven't been talking of anything in particular. Of course it ain't anybody's business."

"Nobody's and everybody's," declared Lydia; "but nobody's in the sense that you can meddle directly in it."

"They was made for each other you might say — such a laughing thing as Medora used to be."

"You never know who's made for each other till they come to be fit together. And then life wears down the edges with married people most times, like it do with a new set of false teeth. Keep her good luck before Me-

dora. Remind her, when you get a chance, how fortunate she is. Life's gone so easy with her that she takes for granted a lot she ought to take with gratitude."

"It's just a passing worry I dare say," suggested Daisy. "When she forgets herself, she'll often laugh and chatter in the old way."

"Well, she's fonder of you than most, so you help her to forget herself as often as you can."

Daisy promised to do so and the elder thanked her.

When the bell rang, they stopped work, and while some, Lydia among them, went to their baskets for dinner, most flung off their overalls, donned hats and jackets and hurried home.

As for Mrs. Trivett, she stopped in the shop, ate her meal, then produced a newspaper and read while others talked.

The day was fine and warm and many groups took their food together in the sun round about the Mill.

Outside the vat house were Jordan Kellock and Robert Life, another vatman, while the new-comer, Philander Knox, ate his dinner beside them. On a bench at hand, Medora and Ned shared the contents of their basket, and the talk ran up and down.

Mr. Knox had won permanent employment without difficulty. Indeed he proved a paper maker of the first rank, and while Mr. Trood deprecated Knox's very unusual stroke, he admitted that the result was as good as possible.

Of this matter they were now speaking.

"Ernest Trood is a great formalist," said Kellock. "He believes in what you may call tradition and a sort of stroke that you'd say was the perfection of the craft. But you can't make a man to a model. You can show him another man who works on a good pattern—no more."

"The stroke comes just like every other stroke, whether it's cricket, or billiards, or shooting, I reckon," said Ned Dingle. "It comes, or else it don't come. Take

me: I've tried a score of times to make paper; but I can't do it. I can't get the stroke. But you might have an apprentice new to it and find, after a month or two, he'd prove himself in the way to be a paper maker."

Mr. Knox, who had already won a friendly greeting from his new associates, in virtue of an amiable character and humorous disposition, admitted that the vatman was born, not made.

"And you may very near say as much for the beater-man," he added. "I never want to see better pulp than you send down to the vat room, Ned Dingle."

"'Tis the life and soul of the paper to have such pulp as yours, Ned," confirmed Kellock, and the beater was pleased. Praise always excited Ned and made him chatter.

"I don't know what there is to it — just thoroughness no doubt and a keen eye and no scamping of the tests. I take a lot more tests than most beaters I reckon," he said.

They discussed their craft and Ned told how for the purposes of the new water-mark pictures destined for a forthcoming exhibition, extraordinary pulp would be necessary.

"Soft as milk it will have to be," he declared.

"I've seen the like," said Knox. "Stuff you'd think couldn't hold together. It's got to find every tiny crevice of the mould; but such pulp takes the dyes exceeding well."

"Our dyes are Trenchard's secret," answered Dingle. "He's a great chemist, as a paper master needs to be. I'd give a lot to look in the laboratory; but only Trood goes there."

"A very understanding foreman is Ernest Trood," admitted Mr. Knox; then he turned to Medora.

"How's they fingers?" he asked.

"Better," she said. "You knock your fingers about rattling them against the crib,"

"The fingers always suffer," he admitted. "For my part I shake when there's a spell of very hot pulp for the thick papers. I'm feared of my life the skin will go somewhere and put me out of action for a bit. If some man could invent a possible glove, many a tender-skinned vatman would bless him. But a glove would kill the stroke no doubt."

Dingle pressed more food from their basket on Medora and the well meant action apparently annoyed her. What passed between them was not heard, save the last words.

"Don't be a fool," she said. "Can't I have my own way even in that?"

"Hush!" replied Ned. "Have it as you will."

But she grew angry; her face lowered and she pressed her lips together.

The others joked and Mr. Knox offered Medora a piece of pie.

"Hard hearted devil, you are, Dingle," he exclaimed. "To eat the cheese and offer your poor girl the bread."

Medora jumped up and at the same moment Daisy Finch came along to seek her. They departed together and strolled from the works up the valley.

But Ned Dingle was evidently disturbed. His face had fallen and he lit his pipe and went slowly after the women.

"Take my tip and leave her alone," shouted Knox; then he caught sight of Kellock's perturbed countenance and turned to him.

"Aren't they good friends?" he asked.

"Of course they are — none better."

"Sometimes a bit of chaff makes a breeze end in laughter," said the elder; "and sometimes it don't."

"Chaff's a ticklish thing," answered Jordan.

"To you it might be, because you're one of the serious sort, that never see much to laugh at in anything," retorted Philander; "but that's your loss. Alice Barefoot in the rag house is the same. Can't see a joke and mistook my fun yesterday for rudeness. I might have known by

her eye she weren't a laughter-loving creature. But Mrs. Dingle can laugh."

"She laughs when there's anything to laugh at," said Kellock drily.

"The art is to find something to laugh at in everything," explained Philander Knox. "And married people ought to practice that for their own salvation more than any."

"How is it you ain't married?" asked Robert Life. He was a man of few words and his wife worked in the glazing house with Medora.

"For the very good reason that my wife's dead," replied Mr. Knox. She's left me for a better place and better company — a very excellent wife according to her lights, and I missed her."

"I dare say you'll find another here," suggested a man who had come along a minute before. It was Henry Barefoot, Alice's brother, the boilerman — an old sailor, who had drifted into the Mill when his service days were done.

"If I do, Henry, it won't be your sister, so don't throw out no hopes," answered Knox.

Henry laughed.

"No man ever offered for her and no man ever will," he declared. "Her pride is to do man's work and she never will do woman's — not if all the men in Devon went on their knees to her."

"I've known others the same," declared Philander. "They're neuter bees, to say it kindly, and they hum so terrible sorrowful over their toil that the male give 'em a wide berth. Duty's their watchword; and they do it in a way to make us common people hate the word."

"That's Alice. You know the sort seemingly," said Henry.

"I've met with 'em. They are scattered about. I used to pity 'em till I found there wasn't no need. They're

quite satisfied with themselves for the most part, but seldom satisfied with other people."

"Alice is a withering woman, though a very good housekeeper and looks after me very well," said Mr. Barefoot.

"As housekeepers they can't be beaten," admitted the other. "But Mrs. Dingle is a very different pattern — a pretty creature — prettiest I've seen for a month of Sundays. They pretty women are exacting in marriage, because nine times out of ten they've been spoiled before. She looks to me as though she wanted something she ain't got."

"Dingle don't know what she wants, for in a minute of temper he told me so," said Mr. Life.

"Don't he? Then you tell him to be quick and find out," advised Philander, "because with a rare piece like that, if he don't, some other young fellow very likely will."

Then Kellock spoke, for this sentiment seemed outrageous to him.

"How can you say such an indecent thing!" he exclaimed. "A man of your age ought to know better."

"A man of your age perhaps don't," answered Mr. Knox. "And yet you're old enough to know the meaning of a pretty girl. But I'm afraid you're one of those chaps that's had some useful things left out of him, Kellock. You ain't called 'Jordan' for nothing I expect. No doubt you wouldn't wish to comfort Mrs. Dingle; but then you're not everybody, and other young men might feel called to cheer her up — no more than that of course. And why you should flush so red and use the word 'indecent' to such a decent man as me, I can't guess."

"You would if you knew more about it, however," said Henry Barefoot. "You ain't up in our history yet, else you'd understand that Kellock here was one of the 'also ran' lot after Medora Dingle. No offence, Jordan — of course such things can't be hid."

"You oughtn't to talk about such private matters, Barefoot," answered Kellock calmly, "and a conversation like this is improper, and for my part I don't wish to hear any more of it. No self-respecting man would pry into such a delicate subject."

"Who's prying?" asked Philander. "I merely say, from my knowledge of human beings in general, that if a pretty young woman's not happy and her husband hasn't got the trick to make her so, 'tis almost any odds some other chap will come along and have a try. That's what would happen in most Christian countries anyway—whether Devonshire's different I don't know, being a stranger to these parts."

"We men mind our own business in Devonshire," said Kellock, and Knox answered promptly.

"Then I'm right," he said, "because a pretty girl down on her luck is every man's business."

"She'll get a fright I dare say," prophesied Robert Life. "I've known more than one young married woman, restless like, who ran a bit of risk; but as a rule their eyes are opened in time and the husband makes good."

Kellock, heartily loathing this conversation, left the others, and when he was gone, Life explained to Mr. Knox the situation.

"Another man might be dangerous," said Henry Barefoot, "for by all accounts Medora liked him very well and was in two minds to the last which she'd take. But Kellock's a good and sober creature and a great respecter of law and order. You can trust him not to break out."

"You speak as a bachelor and your sister's brother, Henry," answered Philander. "Where there's a woman and a man that once loved her, you can no more trust either of 'em not to break out than you can trust a spring in autumn. Kellock's clearly a virtuous soul, and he certainly won't break out if he can help it. You can see by his eyes he's not a lady's man, and never will be in any large and generous sense. But so much the more danger,

for where that sort dines they sleeps when love's the trouble. Let them love once and they'll love for ever, no matter what happens; and if she was fool enough to go playing about with him, she might overthrow him to his own loss in the long run."

These forebodings were cut short by the work bell and Mr. Knox, expressing a hope that he might be mistaken, shook out his pipe and followed Robert back into the vat room.

CHAPTER VI

THE MARTYR

ON a Saturday afternoon full of sunshine was presented the rich but simple picture of Ashprington village under conditions of autumn. The hamlet lay on a slope under a hillcrest and through it fell steep paths by meadow and orchard past the cottages to Bow Bridge far distant in the vale.

Crowning Ashprington rose the church-tower of uniform grey, battlemented, with a great poplar standing on its right, and a yew tree throwing shadow upon the western porch. Then fell the land abruptly, and the whole foreground was filled with an apple orchard, that rippled to the churchyard walls and spread a rich cloth of scarlet and gold around them.

At this hour the tree-founded village seemed oppressed and smothered with falling leaves. Its over-abundant timber mastered the place and flung down foliage in such immense masses that the roads and alleys, drinking fountain, little gardens subtending the street and the roofs of the cottages were all choked with them.

But it was a dry and joyous hour, the latter rains had yet to fall and submerge Ashprington in mud and decay. Virginian creeper flamed on the house fronts and dahlias, michaelmas daisies and chrysanthemums still flaunted in the gardens.

Through this cheerful scene came Miss Finch and Medora Dingle with their baskets to pick blackberries. Medora's home was a stone's throw from the church and they now crossed the churchyard to enter certain fields beyond it.

The well-kept sward spread level with the arms of the apple trees over the wall, for the ground fell sharply from the graveyard to the orchard below; and now, at the limits of the burial place, cider apples fell on the graves and spattered their mounds and flat surfaces with gold.

Daisy stopped at a tomb and removed a windfall of fruit from the broken marble chips that covered it.

"That's old Mr. Kellock," she said. "He wouldn't like them there, would he — such a thrifty old man as he was."

"And such a tidy one," added Medora.

"He was Mr. Jordan's grandfather and left him all his money I believe," continued Daisy; but her friend knew more about that matter than she did.

"He hadn't anything to leave over and above his cottage. That was left to Jordan Kellock and he sold it, not wanting to be troubled with house property. It wasn't worth much."

They passed through the shining fruit trees and stopped to admire them; then Medora, since Mr. Kellock had been mentioned, felt she might return to that subject.

"I often wonder what he'll do," she said. "You feel that he won't be content to stop at Dene all his life."

"Why not?" asked Daisy. "He's got proper good money and is a big man here."

"He'd be a big man anywhere," answered Medora. "It isn't only a matter of wages with him," she added. "Of course we know as a vatman he's one of the best in England, and makes as good paper as there is in the world, I suppose. But he's got more to him than that, Daisy. He's not content with being prosperous and well-thought of. He thinks great thoughts and has great ambitions. I dare say the people here don't see that, for he's a cut above the most of them."

"He is," admitted Daisy. "There's something, I don't know what about him; but it makes me uncomfortable with him."

"That's just his greatness acting on you," explained Medora. "I felt like that once too, but he did me the kindness to explain himself."

"We all know he would have given all he'd got to marry you."

"Don't speak about that. At any rate I understand him better than any other woman — or man for that matter. And though it wasn't to be, I understand him still; and I know he's out for big things sooner or later. He'll make a mark in the world of labour some day."

Daisy looked with admiration at Medora.

"I'm sure I shouldn't know what to answer if he talked to me about such deep subjects," she said. "But then you're married, and you've always got a man in the house to help your brain power."

Medora, secretly nettled at the preposterous suggestion of Ned enlarging her mental outlook, turned to the blackberries and felt a helpless disappointment that even her friend should guess so little of her difficulties and troubles. For now she began day by day to weave round herself and her married life a hollow and false tissue of imaginary tribulations and trials supposed to be sprung from her union with Edward Dingle. Medora set about a sort of histrionics inspired by nothing but her own vague unrest and her own amazing ignorance of reality. Even to herself she could not explain this futile experiment in emotions, yet she persisted and presently, finding certain of her circle were deceived, and even hearing words of pity on a woman's lips, she deluded herself as to the truth of her gathering misfortunes and assured her conscience that the disaster came from without and not within. For at first, in the perpetration of this stupid pose, conscience pricked before Ned's puzzled eyes; but presently, when a silly woman told Medora that she was a martyr, this nonsense of her own brewing seemed indeed the bitter drink life had set to her lips. She echoed and amplified the notion of martyrdom. It was just what she wanted to

excuse her own folly to herself. From accepting the idea, she soon began to credit it. To win the full flavour of the make-believe this was necessary. Then developed the spectacle of a masquerading woman, herself creating the atmosphere in which she desired her world to see her suffer and shine.

As all who acquire a taste for martyrdom, Medora proved amazingly ingenious in plaiting the scourges and selecting the members of the inquisition from her own household. She had reached a preliminary stage in this weak-minded pastime and enjoyed it exceedingly. Ned was much mystified; but the attitude of Ned mattered little. Her real object and the goal of the game lay far beyond Ned. Whereunto all this would lead, Medora did not know; and she told herself that she did not care.

The day was to add a considerable scene to her unfolding drama, though Mrs. Dingle did not guess it when she set out. She had no premonition of the interesting adventure that awaited her when presently she drifted, by hedgerows and lanes, somewhat westward of Ashprington, upon the high road to Totnes.

They were filling their baskets, and for a time Medora had forgotten all about herself and was taking a healthy interest in Daisy's suspicions concerning a young man who worked at Dene Mill, when a bicycle bell warned them and there flashed along upon his way home, Jordan Kellock.

He stopped and they showed him their blackberries and invited him to help himself. Then, together they walked homeward and Medora became concerned to part from Daisy if possible. An opportunity occurred ere long and when the elder pointed out that Miss Finch would gain half a mile by a short cut, her friend took the hint.

"My basket's heavy and you've got company, so I'll go this way home," said Daisy with great tact. Then she bade them good-bye and descended a steep lane to Bow Bridge.

Immediately she had gone, Medora's manner changed from cheerfulness to a more pensive mien.

"Sometimes it's so hard to pretend you're happy," she explained.

"I'm sorry you've got to pretend," he answered.

He had fought awhile against any sort of secret understanding with Medora, but something of the kind now existed, though Jordan could not have explained how it had come about. It seemed not unnatural, however, because he knew the woman so well and felt so supremely interested in her happiness. He believed, in his youthful inexperience, that he might be able to help both Ned and Medora by virtue of his brains and good sense; and he imagined that his championship of Medora, so to call it, emanated entirely from his own will to right and justice. Had anybody hinted to him that Medora was amusing herself with this very delicate material, he must have refused to believe it. He believed in her good faith as he believed in the stars, and he trusted himself completely for a man above the power of temptation. Indeed, as yet he had felt none.

To-day, however, the young woman went further than she had ventured to go.

"I can talk to you, Jordan, and I often thank God I can," she said, "because there's nobody else on earth — not one who understands me like you do."

Not in the ear of him who really understands her does a woman ever confess to be understood; but the listener quite agreed with Medora and believed the truth of what she asserted.

"If thought and true friendship could make me understand, then I do," he answered. "Ned's such a real good chap at heart that —"

"He's not," she said positively. "To my bitter grief I know he's not. Like you, I thought so, and I made myself go on thinking so, for loyalty; but it's no good pretending that any more. He's deceived you as he has me."

He's not good hearted, for all his laughter and noise, else he wouldn't persecute me."

"Don't say that."

"I'm not going into details," declared Medora, quite aware that there were no details to go into; "but he's that rough and harsh. Loses his temper if you look at him. He wasn't like you, and showed me everything about himself when we were courting. He hid the things that matter, and if I'd known the half, or a quarter, of what I know now, I wouldn't have taken him, Jordan."

"Don't say that," he begged again.

"I've got to say it. And I'll say more. It's a relief to speak where your honesty is known, and no false meaning is put to your words. I'll say this, that I made a dreadful mistake, and every year that goes over my head will show it clearer. I can bear it, of course. We women are built to suffer and keep our mouths shut. It's only men that run about with their troubles. Yes, I can bear it, Jordan, and I shall bear it to my grave; but it's hard for a girl of my age to look ahead through all the years of her life and see nothing but dust and ashes. And though I'm brave enough to face it, I'm too frank and open-natured to hide it, and the bitter thing is that people guess that I'm not happy."

"Don't put it as strongly as that, Medora. Don't actually say you're an unhappy woman."

"You're either happy, or else you're not — at any rate, when you're young," she said. "I see the old get into a sort of frozen condition sooner or later, when they're neither one nor the other, being sunk to a kind of state like a turnip in ground; but the young are different. They feel. Why, Daisy, only a few minutes ago, saw my mind was troubled, though I tried ever so to hide it. You know people know it."

"I won't deny that. Everybody's more or less sorry. But between husband and wife, of course, no wise man or woman ventures to come."

"Yes, they do," she answered. "My own mother for one. Kindness made alive to everybody else no doubt, but not to me. She doesn't blame my husband anyway, so she must blame me, I suppose."

"I wouldn't say that. It may be no matter for blame — just the point of view. The great thing is to get at a person's point of view, Medora."

"And don't I try? Don't I interest myself in Ned? I've got a brain, Jordan."

"I know that very well."

"And I can't help seeing only too bitter clear, that my husband's not interested in anything that wants brains to it. He's all for sport and talk and pleasure. I like to think about interesting subjects — human nature and progress, and the future of labour, and so on. And if I try to talk about anything that really matters, he just yawns and starts on shooting birds and football. For the less brains a person has got, the more they want to be chattering. I've married a boy in fact, when I thought I'd married a man; and my charge against Ned is that he hid the truth of himself from me, and made me think he was interested in what interested me, when he was not."

She had mentioned the subjects which she knew attracted Jordan. It was indeed his wearisome insistence on such things that had made her turn of old to the less intelligent and more ingenuous Dingle. In reality she had no mind for abstractions or social problems.

"As we grow older, we naturally go for the subjects that matter," said Kellock. "I've always wanted to leave the world better than I found it, you know, Medora."

"And so you will — you're built to do it," declared she. "And I shall watch you do it, Jordan. And though I've lost it all, I shall see some other woman at your right hand helping you to make a name in the world. And I shall envy her — yes, I shall. I can say that to you, because I can trust you never to repeat it."

"You shake me up to the roots of my being when you

talk like this," he assured her. "Oh, my God, Medora, it seems a cruel sort of thing that just at the critical time, and before it was too late, you couldn't have seen and felt what you see and feel now. It was bad enough then. You'll never know or guess what I felt when you had to say 'no' to me. But I had one thing to keep me going then — the certainty you were too clever to make a mistake. I said to myself a million times: 'She knows best; she knows that Dingle will make her a happier woman than I could.' But now — now — when you say what you've said. Where am I now?"

They talked in this emotional strain for ten minutes, and she wove with native art a web of which both warp and woof were absurdly unreal. Her nature was such that in a task of this sort she succeeded consummately. By a thousand little touches — sighs, looks, and shakes or droops of the head — she contributed to her comedy. She abounded in suggestions. Her eyes fell, her sentences were left unfinished. Then came heroic touches, and a brave straight glance with resolution to take up the staggering weight of her cross and bear it worthily to the end.

Medora was charming, and in her subconscious soul she knew that her performance carried conviction in every word and gesture. She revelled in her acting, and rejoiced in the effect it occasioned on the listener. Long ago, Kellock had set her, as she guessed, as a lovely fly in amber, never to change, though now for ever out of his reach. He had accepted his loss, but he continued to regard her as his perfect woman, and she cherished the fact as a great possession. Perhaps, had it been otherwise, she had not entered upon her present perilous adventure; but she knew that Jordan Kellock was a knight of weak causes, and one who always fought for the oppressed, when in his power to do so; and now she had created a phantom of oppression, which his bent of mind and attitude to herself prevented him from recognising as largely unreal.

Kellock was young; he had loved Medora in the full

measure of a reserved nature, and to-day she deluded him to the limit of his possibilities. Her complete triumph indeed almost frightened her. For a few moments he became as earnestly concerned as on the great occasion when he had asked her to marry him. Then she calmed the man down, and told him that he must not waste his time on her troubles.

"It's selfish of me to tell you these things — perhaps it's wrong," she said, truly enough; but he would not grant that. His emotion was intense; his pain genuine. Her intuition told her that here was a man who might err — if ever he erred — in just such a situation as she was creating. She was surprised to find the ease with which it was possible to rouse him, and felt this discovery enough for that day. She grew elated, but uneasy at the unexpected power she possessed. Her sense of humour even spoke in a still, small voice, for humour she had.

Chance helped her to end the scene, and, a hundred yards from home, Ned himself appeared with his gun over his shoulder and a hare in his hand.

Dingle was in cheerful spirits.

"A proper afternoon I've had," he said. "Ernest Trood asked me to go out shooting along with him and some friends, and we've enjoyed sport, I promise you. A rare mixed bag. We began in the bottom above the Mill, and got a woodcock first go off, and then we worked up and had a brace and a half of partridges, a brace of pheasants, and a hare, and eight rabbits. I knew what you'd like, Medora, and I took a partridge, and the hare for my lot. I shot them, and four rabbits and one of the pheasants."

"What a chap for killing you are," said Jordan, while Ned dragged a partridge from his pocket and handed it to his wife.

Nobody loved nice things better than she, but she took the bird pensively and stroked its grey and russet feathers.

"Poor little bird, your troubles are ended," she said.

Then she assumed a cheerful air, which struck Jordan as unspeakably pathetic.

"I've been busy, too. Look at my blackberries."

Ned praised the blackberries, and in his usual impulsive fashion offered Kellock the hare; but Jordan declined it.

"Thrown away upon me," he said.

"Come and help us to eat it one night then," suggested Dingle, and Medora echoed his wish.

"I'm sure you're very kind. I'll come up to supper any evening, if you mean it."

Then he mounted his bicycle and rode off down the hill.

"He came along from Totnes, while Daisy and I were picking blackberries, and he stopped and would carry my basket for me," she explained.

"He looked a bit down in the mouth, didn't he?"

"He was. He's such a man to feel other people's troubles."

"Whose? Not yours, I should hope?"

She laughed.

"Good powers, no! I'm not one to tell my troubles — you know that, or ought to. I'm a proud woman, whatever you may be. It isn't personal things, but general questions that bother him. Poverty and want and injustice, and all that. I cheered him up, and tried to make him forget."

"He'll do better to leave such subjects alone," said Dingle. "The woes of the world in general ain't his job; and if he tries to make them his job, he may find it won't pay him to do so."

"That's your pettifogging opinion; but if every man in good employment was as selfish as you, the poor might remain poor for ever," she answered.

"Well, don't you be a fool, anyway, there's a dear. You've got to look after me, not the poor in general. And nobody can look after me better than you, when you please. It's a choice between beer and tea this minute, so choose which I'm to have."

"Tea," she said. "If you can be patient for a little."

They went in together, and he was pleased to find Medora amiable and willing, though ignorant that her good temper sprang not from his inspiration.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLUE MARK

FROM the rag house, through trap doors, the rag descended from Lydia and her fellow workers to a huge object like a mowing machine. The rags came to this monster and passed through its whirling knives. Then, having been clipped pretty small, they were carried on an endless ribbon up again to the magnet. Two great magnetized rollers revolved, and, in a dingy niagara, every fraction of the old rag tumbled over them, to run an electric gauntlet and receive a challenge. The bossy rollers were even quicker than the women's fingers, and a fraction of metal, however small, responded to their attraction instantly. There was a click and instead of falling with its neighbours, the offending rag found itself arrested and pilloried on a boss. It clung to the roller, and, as the cylinder turned, became de-magnetized again and fell in a place apart. The danger to future processes was thus lessened materially and but little foreign matter in shape of metal escaped to be a nuisance later on.

To the duster then came the harassed rag and in open wire barrels amid revolving wooden prongs it was whirled round and round and further cleansed.

Then to Henry Barefoot it went, and Henry always declared that in his hands the material received first serious treatment.

"The rag don't know it's born till it gets to the boiler-man," he was wont to say.

The boiler-house lay under an arched roof of corrugated iron. It was a damp place, full of hot air and the heavy scent of washing. The steam thinned and feathered away

through holes in the roof. In the floor were deep square hollows and here the boilers revolved, with a solemnity proper to their size. They were huge metal receptacles capable of holding a ton each; and when the rag was packed, with water and alkalies to cleanse it, the loaded giant turned ponderously over and over, churning the mass for three or four hours. Then the seething clouts were dragged forth, their pollutions drained away and further stages of lustration entered upon.

Thus far the rag had come under rough control and reign of law. By air and water and chastening of many blows it was reduced to a limp and sodden condition, amenable to discipline, more or less prepared for the tremendous processes between its final disintegration as rag and its apotheosis as paper.

A paper man will tell you he turns "old shirts into new sheets": and that indeed is what he does; but a long and toilsome journey lies between the old shirt and its apotheosis.

Henry Barefoot was a placid man, as long as the rag came to him exactly when he wanted it. Under ordinary circumstances he accomplished his part in the great machine as obscurely as any invisible wheel, or steam pipe. But if the women delayed, or he was "hung up," as he put it, then his chivalry broke down and he swore long and loud at those who interfered with his activities. At such times he became tragic and exceedingly profane. He expanded and broke into uncouth gestures and simian scowls. He appealed to Heaven in these great moments and asked of the sky why women had been created. Sometimes his sister, Alice, was sent for from the thresher to pacify him, and when she failed, Lydia Trivett, at the sound of Henry's roaring in the boiler-house, would slip from her lattice and strive to calm his fury.

The women had fled before him at one of these explosions and Alice having also failed, approached Mrs. Trivett and begged her to intervene.

She went, to find Mr. Barefoot standing with steam about him and his hand lifted to the corrugated iron roof above his grey head.

"Oh, my God, my God!" he said. "What have I done to be the prey of a lot of worthless females—"

"Your rag's waiting, Henry," interrupted Lydia.

"His rag's out, I should think," said a woman from behind Lydia. "An evil-speaking toad — always blasting us. And how can we help it?"

"You know very well, Henry, there must be a hitch sometimes with such a lot of dirty rag," explained Lydia. "We've all got to keep going, and it's no more good or sense cussing us than it is for them in the engine house to cuss you. And men wouldn't do this work half as well as women, as you'd very soon find if we were gone. And it's a very ill-convenient thing for you to lose your temper, and nobody will be sorrier than you in an hour's time."

As the rag now awaited him, Henry subsided.

"It's a plot against me," he said, "and I've no quarrel with you, Lydia. It ain't your department. It's they baggering women at the magnet, and they want for me to get the sack as I very well know. But they'll get fired themselves — every trollop of 'em — afore I shall."

"They don't want you to get fired. Why should they? What have you done to them? Why, you haven't even asked one of 'em to marry you," said Lydia.

"No — they needn't hope that," he answered. "I've seen too much of woman since I came here ever to want one for my own."

So the breeze subsided and Henry filled his empty boiler, growling himself back to his usual calm the while. It was characteristic of him that between these dynamic discharges, he preserved an amiable attitude to those among whom he worked, and when a storm had passed, he instantly resumed friendly relations.

Within an hour of this scene, when dinner time came, he descended to the ground floor and cautioned two girls who

were skipping off down a flight of steps that led from the rag house to the ground below.

"Don't you go so fast," he said. "When slate steps are wet with rain, they're beastly slippery, and some day one of you maidens will fall and break yourselves."

Mrs. Trivett put on her old black bonnet, for she was going out to dinner with another woman; but as she prepared to depart, her son-in-law met her.

"It's important," he said. "I want half an hour with you, mother, and I dare say Mrs. Ford won't mind if you go along with her to-morrow instead."

Mrs. Ford made no difficulty and Lydia returned to the rag house with Ned, who brought his meal with him.

"I've got a tid-bit for you here," he explained. "A bit of jugged hare which you'll like. And I wouldn't trouble you but for a very good reason."

They sat in a corner among some rag bales, beyond ear-shot of others who were eating their meal in the rag house.

"Where's Medora?" asked Mrs. Trivett.

"She's having dinner in the glazing room to-day. So I took the opportunity. It's about her I want to talk. But eat first. I don't want to spoil the jugged hare."

He brought out a small pudding basin containing the delicacy and his mother-in-law ate heartily and declared the dish very good.

"Medora can cook, whatever she can't do," said Lydia.

"There's nothing she can't do," he answered; "but there's a damned lot of things she won't do. And that's the trouble to me. Time was when we saw alike every way and never had a word or a difference of opinion; but that time's past seemingly, and I want to know why; and if you know, I wish you'd tell me. It's all in a nutshell so far as I can see. What am I doing to vex her? God's my judge I don't know. I'm the same as I always have been. A chap like me don't change. I only want to be patient and cheerful and go on with my life as I'm going. It's her

that's changed. She used to love a bit of fun and laughter and be friendly and easy-going and jolly and kind. That's what she was when I married her anyway. But she's changed and I'm getting fairly fed up, because I don't know of any fault in myself to explain it. If I'd pretended to be different from what I am before we were married and deceived her in anything, then she'd have a case against me. But nobody can say I did. She knew just what I was, and I thought I knew just what she was."

"You did, Ned," said Mrs. Trivett earnestly. "You take my word that you did know just what she was. And what she was, she is still under her skin. She can't change really, any more than you can, or anybody else. She took you because you suited her and she knew she'd be happy with you. And what's happening to her just now is a passing thing calling for patience. Women have their funny moods and whims — Medora like the rest."

"I grant that, but how long is it going to last? I know they get queer in their heads sometimes, but she's down in the mouth always now. I can't pleasure her, do what I may, and the things that always delighted her a year ago bore her now. Damn it! She looks at me sometimes as if she was a schoolmistress and I was a wicked boy."

"It's like this with her; and it's the same with lots of people who have had nothing but a good time all their lives. Instead of knowing their luck, they take their luck to be just the usual state of things, and they don't look round and see the scores of people without their good fortune: they only fancy that other people are more fortunate than them. They get so bored with the good that they begin to picture something better. Everybody wants better bread than is made of wheat sometimes, and especially them that have never tasted worse. We, that have had to eat barley bread, know our luck — t'others don't. The thing for you is to be patient. You're all right and you're

going on all right so far as I can tell. I'll take your word of that and I very well understand your difficulties. But you're a man and you've got the brains."

"She says not," he answered. "That's one of the nice things I'm called to hear now. She didn't quarrel with my sense or my nonsense a year ago. Now she says right out that she wishes I had more intellects. Not a very nice thing to hear. I might be a stone-breaker, or a hedge-tacker with no sense at all."

"Be patient with her. It's a whim, and what's responsible for it I don't know more than you. But it will pass. She can't go on pretending she's an unhappy woman —"

"No, and she shan't," he said. "I'm only a human man myself, and it's a proper outrage for her to make out she's being bullied and evil treated by a chap that worshipped the ground under her feet and would again. She's mean, mother."

"No, Ned, she's foolish; she ain't mean."

"She is mean. List to this. Two night ago Kellock came to supper with us — to help eat that jugged hare — and the talk was serious to death, as it always is with him — him being such a serious man. And presently, among a lot of other soaring notions, Medora wondered what was the height of bliss. And she said the height of bliss was to feel she was doing good, noble work in the world and helping to make people happier."

Mrs. Trivett sniffed, but did not respond.

"Well," continued Ned, "I didn't say nothing to that, though it sounded a bit thin to me; but Kellock declared it was a very grand thought, and for his part the height of bliss was to feel you'd got a move on, and was leaving a mark and doing solid spade work, that would lift the next generation to more happiness. And, of course, Medora purred over that. And then she asked me what my height of bliss was — in a pitying tone of voice, as though she and Jordan belonged to another world. Well, I said my height of bliss was lying in my new bath-room of a Satur-

day night, with the hot water up to my chin, thinking of my savings in the bank."

"You didn't, Ned!"

"I did — just to give 'em a shake up. And just to remind Medora I built that bath-room on to my house — not because I wanted it, but because she did. Well, I knew Kellock wouldn't see the joke, because he ain't built to; but, damn it — I did think Medora would. I expected she'd laugh and lighten up the talk a bit. But not her. She pulled a long face, and said I ought to be ashamed to confess such ideas. And that was mean — you can't deny it."

"It was," admitted Medora's mother. "Her sense of fun's deserted her; or else she's hiding it of a purpose."

"Another thing," grumbled Mr. Dingle, "that same night when Kellock was gone, I got a bit angered with her, God forgive me, and I took her rough by the arm, and it left a bit of a blue mark on her skin. I very nearly went on my knees for sorrow after, and she forgave me, and made it up. Well, you'd think a decent woman would have kept her sleeve down for a day or two till the mark was gone; but I went to speak to her in the glazing room yesterday, and there was her forearm bare for all the women to see, and the chaps at the presses. And when they asked her how she came by it, as they did, she made a business of not telling them — which, of course, did tell them. And that was mean, too."

Mrs. Trivett looked anxious, and put her hand on his arm.

"Don't you knock her about, Ned. I know how aggravating a woman can be; but don't you do that. I'm not standing up for her, and I'll talk to her again and try to show her what she's doing; but don't you give her a shadow of excuse for this silliness, because, in her present mood, she'll be very quick to take advantage of it. I know you very well, and I was properly glad when Medora took you and not the other, because I knew her, too, and felt she'd

be happier with you in the long run. But I only say again, be patient until seventy times seven, there's a good man, for that's all you can do about it at present."

"So I will then," he promised, "and we'll leave it at that. And if you'll take your chance to talk sense to her, I'll be a good bit obliged."

The rain had ceased, and Lydia went out for a breath of air, while Ned lighted his pipe and accompanied her. A good few of the workers were at hand, and Mr. Knox, seeing Mrs. Trivett and her son-in-law, joined them. Kellock passed, but did not stop, and Philander Knox praised him.

"Now, there's a chap that'll go far — either here or somewhere else," he said. "Most of you Devon people I've yet met with are pretty easy-going, like myself; but that man is not. He's more than a paper maker. Dingle here, and Life, and old Pinhey, the finisher, and Trood are content to go on their way, and leave other people to do the same. Kellock is not."

"He's got ideas," said Lydia.

"He has. I've took a room in the same house where he lodges, and I've heard him air his notions. They're commonplace talk where I come from, but a bit ahead of the times in the West Country. We middle-aged folk ain't interested in 'em, but the rising generation is. He told me straight out that we ought to have shop stewards in the Mill."

"Not at all," said Dingle. "We don't want nothing of that here."

"A burning mind for the rights of labour," continued Knox, "and though you may think we don't want shop stewards, and I may think so, and the boss may think so, shop stewards are a sign of the times, and they'll come everywhere before long."

"I hope not," said Lydia.

"And shop stewardesses," added Philander; "and if

that happened, you'd have to rise to it, Mrs. Trivett, for the good of the young women."

Lydia laughed.

"They might be wanted in some places — not here," she said. "We all work very comfortably and steady, and there's none discontented in my department, that I know about."

"Just because you're the head of it and are a very clever and human sort of woman," answered Mr. Knox. "You've got the touch, and you understand the nature of the female and how to keep her in a good temper, and how to get a fair day's work for a good day's wages."

Ned left them at this juncture, and Mr. Knox proceeded. Much to her surprise he praised Mrs. Trivett in good set terms.

"Well, well!" she said. "It ain't often I hear my virtues mentioned, and I'm afraid you've named a good few I can't lay claim to. Women's only a greater puzzle than men, in my experience, and I don't pretend that I know half that goes to either sort."

"Character is a great mystery," he added.

"So it is then, and I don't want to look farther than at home to know it."

Mrs. Trivett was speaking to herself rather than Philander in this speech; she did not design any confession, but he appeared to guess what was in her mind. Indeed, he did, for he had seen her in company with Dingle, which was an unusual incident at the Mill, and he heard much of the rumour that Ned and his wife were out. He had also heard of the blue mark on Medora's arm, from Mr. Pinhey, whose operations as finisher took place in the glazing room.

"And if there's a blue mark on her arm, who knows what marks there may be hidden elsewhere?" murmured Mr. Pinhey, with horrified eyes, behind his spectacles.

"As a man once married, though without a family, I

can understand that," answered Knox to Lydia. "And if I may say so, I venture respectfully to sympathise with what's in your mind. I've heard about Mrs. Dingle, and nothing but kindness, for I'm sure everybody likes her, though not as well as they like you. And if it's not pushing in, which is the last thing I would do, I should be interested to know if, between Kellock and her husband, she took the right one in your opinion."

Mrs. Trivett felt some concern that a newcomer should have learned so much of the family history. But he spoke with such propriety that she could not be annoyed. She liked Mr. Knox, and found him, as everybody else did, a good-natured and amiable person. It was true that Mr. Trood had said that Knox was "downy," but his downiness had not yet appeared to simpler eyes.

She parried his question.

"You know them both — what do you think?"

"I know them, but I can't say I know her," he answered. "However, I know her mother, if I may say so, without offence, and if Mrs. Dingle favours you, then I'd say without hesitation that she chose the right party."

"She's like me and not like me," explained Lydia. "I was pretty near what she is at her age."

"Better looking, I expect," he interrupted.

"No, nothing like so fine — just a little go-by-the-ground woman, same as I am now. But in character, not unlike her. And if I'd had so good a time as she has had, no doubt I should have made the same mistakes and not known reality better than her."

"You can have too much reality," declared Philander. "Most of us poor people have such a deuce of a lot of reality that we get tired of it. There's thousands for that matter that never have anything else; and reality ain't fattening if you belong to the labouring classes. But if she'd took Jordan Kellock, then she'd have known what reality was, and very likely gone down under it, like a mole under a cart wheel. He's a wonderful good, earnest man

— worth all the rest of us put together, I dare say ; but as a husband for a young, pretty, laughter-loving woman — no. He ain't built that way, and if your Medora finds that Dingle isn't all she dreamed — as what man is after the gilt's off the gingerbread? — then let her be sure she'd have done still worse along with Kellock."

Mrs. Trivett was moved, and nodded vigorously. "Very good sense, and you echo me," she answered. "I've thought much the same. You're an understanding man, and kind-hearted seemingly, and have been married yourself, so you see things in a large spirit. I think my girl took the right one."

"Then she did, for you'd make no mistake," declared Knox. "And if the right one, then we can trust time to prove it. I'm a great believer in the marriage state myself. It's a power for good most times, and so I hope you found it."

But Mrs. Trivett was not prepared for any further confidences on this occasion. She did not answer his question, though she expressed herself a believer in marriage.

CHAPTER VIII

ASSAULT AND BATTERY

IN the engine house a small, hump-backed man sat picking over the masses of wet rag brought to him by Henry Barefoot from the boilers. For, despite the sorters and the magnet, enemies to paper still lurked in the sodden rag, and the little man ran the sloppy stuff through his fingers, extracting from time to time fragments of rubber, whalebone, pearl, and other substances.

The engine house was a lofty chamber on two floors, with windows that faced the west. Here, Ned Dingle reigned, and half a dozen men worked under him. Much happened to the rag before it came to Ned, for after its final picking, it was washed again, and broken before the beater turned it into pulp. When the little hump-backed man had passed it, the rag was set revolving with water in oval, lead-lined breakers. On one side the washer, like a steamer's paddle-wheel, churned in a bladed barrel, so that the rag was not only cleaned again, but also torn to the smallest fragments; on the other side a drum of brass wire sucked away the dirty water, while from the upper end clean water was perpetually spurting in. Round and round the rag revolved for three hours, by which time its character had changed entirely. It was, in fact, rag no more, but a substance like curds: "half stuff," or rag transformed and half-way to its final stages.

From the breakers the pulpy mass left the engine house for a time, and sojourned in the bleaching tanks beneath. It flowed down through pipes to a subterranean chamber, where the air was sharp with the smell of chemicals, and

twelve great, gaping wells ranged round a narrow passage way. Here came the "half stuff" to repose on beds of Delabole slate, and endure the operations of the bleach for half a day or more. Then the liquid was drained off, the snow-white, solid masses forked out on to little trolleys, and so returned to Ned Dingle in the engine house. Again it revolved until the bleach was thoroughly washed out of it, for it is a principle of great paper making that the less chemicals, the better the pulp; and now perfected, washed, broken and bleached, the material came to the beater for final dissection.

The beaters' engines were oval in form and resembled the breakers. They stood upon the lower floor of the engine house, and each communicated directly with the breaker above it, and the vat room far beneath. From final washing, the pulp flowed directly to Mr. Dingle, and, as before, revolved, and was churned by a paddle-wheel set with fine knives. Ned controlled it, and on his judgment depended the quality of the pulp that would presently flow down to Kellock, Knox, and the other vatmen.

He was explaining the process to a young man, who had just been promoted to his assistant from the breakers above.

"It's got to meet every test that experience can bring against it, Jacob," he said. "And if it did not, I should mighty soon hear of it."

He regulated the churning wheel with a footplate, and presently, satisfied that the mass, which was now like fine cream after revolving in the beating tank for many hours, had reached perfection, Ned took a test to satisfy himself.

Two hand-bowls, or dippers, he lifted, scooped up a few ounces of the pulp, then mixed it with pure water, and flung the liquid backwards from one dipper to the other, pouring off and adding fresh water until what was left in his bowl resembled water barely stained with soap. The pulp was now so diluted that it needed sharp eyes to see anything in the water at all; but Dingle, taking it to the

window, set it slowly dribbling away over the edge of the bowl, and as it flowed, the liquid revealed tiny fragments and filaments all separate, and as fine as spider's thread. The spectacle of these attenuated fibres of cotton told the beaterman that his engine was ready and the pulp sufficiently fine. The masses of rag, once linen and lace, and every sort of textile fabric woven of cotton, had become reduced to its limit of tenuity, and was now far finer stuff than in the cotton pod of its creation. It had been beaten into countless millions of fibrils, long and short, and all so fine as to need sharpest scrutiny of human eye to distinguish them.

Jacob — a future beaterman — followed Ned's operations closely; then he made a test himself and watched the cotton gossamer flow over the edge of his bowl.

"And next week," declared Ned, "something finer still has got to be made — so fine that I shall have to borrow a pair of spectacles to see it — good as my eyes are. And that's the pulp for the Exhibition moulds. It's to be a record — such paper as never before was made in the world. But this is just ordinary, first class rag pulp — stuff that will last till doomsday if properly handled. Now it's going down to Knox's vat."

He sent a boy to the vat room to warn Philander that a re-inforcement was about to descend. Then he sought a square shaft in the corner of the engine house, took off the lid and revealed an empty, lead-lined box, having six holes at the bottom. Each was securely stopped and all communicated with the great chests that held the pulp for the paper makers below.

He opened one hole, drew a valve from the beating engine and allowed it slowly to empty into the box. The white mass sank away out of it; there was a gurgle and a splash of air from the valve as the engine emptied; while with a wooden rake Ned scraped the last of the pulp to the aperture, whence it ran to the box above the chests in the vat room.

"No. 4 chest is being filled, so it's No. 4 hole I've opened in the box," he explained. "Now it's all run down very quick you see, and my beater is empty."

Then the breaker above disgorged another load of "half stuff" into the beater, and after he had used a beating roll, he set the paddle-wheel going again and the new consignment revolved on its way.

Ned took a keen interest in his work and though he might be casual and easy-going in all other affairs of life, it was clear that he could be serious enough over the operations of the beater. He was very thorough and never left anything to chance. Opportunity for initiative did not enter into his labours; but the hard and fast lines of perfection he followed with keen application, and it was his fair boast that he had never sent bad pulp to the vatmen. Though a mechanical calling, Ned did not approach it in a mechanical spirit. It was his particular gift and privilege to feel a measure of enthusiasm in the craft, and he prided himself upon his skill.

Novelty now awaited him, for the pulp presently to be made would differ in quality from the familiar material. The beating it to an impalpable fineness would be his work. The pulp was also to be dyed with new tinctures, not used until now.

For not only snowwhite material descended to the vat room. The dyeing was a part of Mr. Dingle's operation in many cases, and the various colours of foreign currency papers went into the stuff during its sojourn in the beaters.

Dingle, satisfied with his pupil, put on his coat when the dinner bell rang, the steam pulses of the works subsided and the power stopped. He took his basket and descended a long flight of steps to the vat room, where Kellock, Life and the other paper makers had just knocked off work. Others joined them, for the vast and airy vat room was a favourite place for dinner; but Medora did not come. For several weeks now she had ceased to meet Ned at the hour of the mid-day meal. The fact was, of course, noted

and debated behind Dingle's back; but none spoke of it in front of him.

The change in Medora at this stage of her existence was obvious enough to all; while that which marked her husband did not appear so clearly. The reason had been easy to see, though few knew enough about them to see it. Medora, while really disingenuous, revealed her tribulation, because she desired everybody to perceive it; while Ned, naturally an open and simple creature, endeavoured with the instinct of a decent male to hide his worries from the public eye. He failed, however, because he was not built to play a part, while Medora succeeded to perfection. Thus she created an impression of secret woes that did not really exist, while Ned attempted to conceal anxieties which were real enough. His temper suffered under a strain that he was not created to endure, for his wife's attitude, having first puzzled him, began to anger him. He lost his temper with her on certain occasions and her sublime patience under his rough tongue by no means turned his wrath from her. For nothing is more maddening, if you are the smiter, than to have the other cheek turned to you by a sufferer, who displays obvious gusto at your chastisement. Ned soon saw that Medora liked him to be violent and brutal. It was meat and drink to her to see him in a rage. He guessed, and not wrongly, that if he had beaten her, she must have relished the pain — not for itself, but for the exquisite pleasure of relating her sufferings to other people afterwards.

She was changed, as any woman is who for pleasure or profit plays a part. Indeed many persist in such histrionics when profit has long ceased, for simple artistic delight at the impersonation. It is natural to prefer a rôle which we can perform to perfection, before others wherein we are not so effective.

The suffering and wronged and ill-treated heroine proved an impersonation that suited Medora's temperament exactly, and having once assumed it, she promised to

persist in it beyond the limits of her husband's patience. She would doubtless tire sooner or later, since it is the instinct of every actor to desire new parts and new successes; but she was not going to tire of it while she made such a hit, won so much attention and created such a dramatic and exciting atmosphere about her. In fact Medora now felt herself to be the centre of her own little stage, and the experience so much delighted her that it was difficult sometimes to retain the air of crushed, Christian resignation proper to the character.

But the situation she had created out of nothing real, now developed and began to take unto itself dangerous elements of reality. Such theatricals do not stand still, and instead of subsiding, as Lydia hoped it would, Mrs. Dingle's objections and grievances, woven of gossamer at first, began to grow tougher. She guessed that she would catch more than herself in these elaborate reticulations, and she persisted until she found another was becoming entangled also.

At first, to do her justice, Medora hesitated here. But she could not pour her woes into Kellock's ears without a reaction from him, and his attitude towards her confession naturally influenced her. For, while some of her elders suspected, according to the measure of their wits, that Medora was acting, one man saw no shadow of deception. Every word rang true on his ear, for circumstances combined hopelessly to hoodwink him. His own serious nature, from which any powers of illusion or sleight were excluded, read nothing but the face value into Medora's woe-full countenance and the word value into her hopeless speeches. Not for him to answer mock heroics with banter, or reply to burlesque with irony. Had he been made of different stuff, he might have saved Medora from herself at this season; but being himself, the admirable man was terribly perturbed and indeed found himself beset with sore questions and problems from which both his character and personal attitude to the girl precluded escape. For he

loved her, and the fact that she was an unhappy woman did not lessen his love; while, beyond that, his altruistic instincts must have brought him into a delicate complication in any case when once invited to participate. And now he did enter, with motives that could not honestly be considered mixed, for he was thus far influenced only by a conviction that it might be possible to help both sufferers to a better understanding. He knew that he enjoyed a far larger measure of intellect than Ned, and he felt that to shirk an effort for Medora's sake would be cowardly. He had indeed convinced himself that it was his duty to act.

He proceeded to tackle Ned, but he approached the task without the attitude of mind vital to success. For success in such a ticklish matter demanded in Kellock a standpoint of absolute impartiality. He must, if he were to do any good whatever, come to Dingle with a mind as open and unprejudiced as possible; whereas, though he knew it not, Jordan's mind by no means stood in that relation to the pair. Had it done so, he had probably not interfered; for in truth it could not be altruism alone that prompted him to the step he was now about to take, but a very active and sincere sympathy for Medora in her alleged griefs. He believed her with all his heart and he had a great deal more concern for Mrs. Dingle's point of view, which he accepted, than for her husband's, which he had neither heard nor considered.

The men had eaten their dinner, and Ned, out of a cheerful demeanour, which he brought from his work, presently sank into taciturnity. From no will to do so, but powerlessness to prevent it, he showed those about him that his thoughts were not pleasant. Indeed the most casual had noticed that he was of late only himself in the engine house, and that nothing but work sufficed to take him out of himself. Away from it, he brooded and did not chatter and jest as of old.

To-day he was more than usually abstracted and Kellock seized the opportunity. Ned's meal was finished in ten

minutes and when he began to stuff his pipe, the other asked him to come for a stroll up the valley.

"Let's go up to the ponds and see if there are any birds about, Ned," he said.

A little surprised, since the bird that interested Kellock was unknown, Ned nevertheless agreed to take a walk.

"Certainly," he answered. "Me and Trood flushed a woodcock there yesterday, and I dare say on Saturday Trood will bring him down. He's a mark on a woodcock — never misses 'em."

They strolled together up the valley where it fell gently to the Mill.

A quarter of a mile above the works the coomb narrowed to a bottle-neck, through which a water-fall came down. The road wound through this gap and on one side of it rose old, blue limestone quarries, their jagged scarps and ridges fledged with gorse and oak scrub; while on the other side of the water a limestone bluff ascended, weathered to fine colour, and above it towered Scotch firs and ivy-clad beeches that followed the foot of the hill and flung their arms around a little mere, lying in the hollow of the undulating land.

In spring this cup shone emerald green; but now the place was grey and silver. Alders and sallows towered black against the bright water; sedges and reed mace had huddled into tangle of russet and amber. They brightened where the sun touched them and burned over the placid lake, while the highest colour note was a spindle tree, whereon hung its harvest of pink and orange fruit, though all the leaves were fled. The flame of it cast a brilliant reflection into the face of the mirror below; and as Ned and Jordan approached by a winding way, that skirted the mere, coot and moorhen scuttled off leaving double trains behind them, widening out upon the waters.

Here it was that Kellock broached the great matter at his heart; and because it was at his heart, whereas he imagined it solely in his head, he found within the space

of two minutes that he had made a very grievous mistake.

Beside the lake spoke Jordan, while Ned had his eyes in the sedges and distant mud flats for a woodcock.

"It's about your wife I wanted to say a word, and I know we're too good friends for you to object. You see, Ned, when you look at the past —"

"To hell with the past," answered Dingle shortly. "It's the future I look at. You take my tip and keep out of this — specially seeing you wanted her yourself once."

"I must speak," answered the vatman mildly, "and just for that reason, Ned. When she took you, you'll remember I followed a very self-respecting line about it. But at your wish — at your wish, Ned — I kept my friendship for Medora and you; and it's out of that friendship I want to say I think things might be bettered."

"She's been washing our dirty linen for your pleasure then?"

"Not at all. But —"

"God damn it!" burst out the other. "Ain't there to be any peace left in the world? You get out of this and keep out of it, or —"

"Don't be silly, Ned,— listen."

"To you? Not much. There's some hooken-snivey going on here by the looks of it. Blast you — there — that's my answer to you!"

Dingle, in a white-hot passion, swung his arm, hit Kellock on the side of his head with a tremendous blow and knocked him down. They were on the edge of the lake and Medora's champion rolled over and fell into water ten feet deep. He was stunned and sank, then came to the surface again.

Ned's rage vanished with the blow, for now he saw in a moment the gravity of the situation. Kellock appeared to be unconscious and would certainly drown if left in the water.

The man on the bank flung himself upon his stomach, leant over, gripped his victim by the collar and dragged him breast high under the bank. In this position Kellock came at once to his senses.

"I'm sorry — I'm cruel sorry," said Dingle. "Lift up your hands and put 'em round my neck — then I'll heave you out."

Kellock opened his eyes and panted, but did nothing for a moment.

"For God's sake make an effort — I can't help you else. Get your arms round my neck, Jordan."

The other obeyed and in a few moments he was safe. Ned fished his cap out of the water, wrung it and handed it to him.

"I'm bitter sorry — my cursed temper."

Kellock sat down for a moment and pressed the water out of his clothes. He was quite calm.

"I dare say it was natural," he answered. "If you'd but listened —"

"You can't listen to things if you're in hell. Take my arm. No good biding here. I'll see you to your house. You can have the law of me. I deserve it. I'm no bloody good to anybody in the world now-a-days. Better I was locked up, I reckon."

"Don't talk rot. We're all learners. You've learned me something anyway. See me home. I'm dazed, but I shall be all right in a minute. And don't let on about this. I shall say I slipped on the edge of the water and fell in and bruised my head — just an accident and my fault. And so it was my fault."

"I won't have that. You rub it in. I've earned it. I shall tell the people what I am, if you don't."

"That won't do," answered the other. "Think of me as well as yourself in that matter. You're popular; I'm not; and if they hear you've knocked me into the water, they'll say there was a reason for it."

Dingle did not answer, but he knew this to be true.

"Least said soonest mended then."

"For your wife's sake, Ned."

"Leave her out, please. I'm in your debt and I shan't forget it."

They met some women returning to the works and lied to them. All expressed great concern. Then Ned brought Kellock to his rooms and begged him to drink some spirits which he refused to do.

"Mind we tell the same tale about this," said Jordan. "I fell in and you grabbed me from the bank and brought me ashore. After all it's the truth, so far as it goes."

Dingle agreed and then returned to his work; while the injured man, though in considerable pain, only waited to change his clothes and then hastened back to the Mill, to explain his accident and be chaffed for his carelessness.

CHAPTER IX

THE OLD PRIORY

THERE was none to drag up the melancholy blossoms of Medora's woe and display the fact that they had no roots; but she kept them alive nevertheless; and since she was tickled to persist in folly by the increasing interest created from her alleged sufferings, she woke up to find those sufferings real at last. She had now earned a great deal of pity and won a reputation for patience and endurance. She had also awakened a certain measure of feeling against Ned, which was inevitable, and now conditions which she had implied, knowing at the bottom of her heart they did not exist, began to develop in reality. The man was not built to watch Medora's histrionics in patience for ever, and she found him growing harsh and rough.

Then there was no more play-acting for Medora. Outraged in every instinct, her sense of humour dead and her self-consciousness morbidly hypertrophied, she began to hate the man she had married. The cause of his changed attitude she forgot; and the bad usage for which she had deliberately played, when it came she resented with all her soul. Now she ceased to be a wife to him and daily threatened to leave him.

A series of incidents more or less painful led to the threshold of complete estrangement and Medora was always ahead of her husband and always a good stage farther advanced to the final rupture than was he. Indeed he never knew until the climax burst upon him that it was so near. He did wrong things at this season, was hard when he should have been gentle, and allowed himself brutalities of speech and action. But again and again after

such ebullitions, he was contrite, abased himself and implored Medora to help him to a better comradeship and understanding.

Each sought to confide, and Ned confided in Medora herself, while she went elsewhere. Her interest was rapidly shifting and her husband's efforts at reconciliation meant nothing now. For the time being she heartily loathed him, and the sound of his voice in the house, and the fall of his foot. Yet between his furies he had struggled hard to restore their friendship. He had confessed the incident with Kellock and described to Medora how, in his passion that anybody should presume to come between them, even with good advice, he had turned on the vatman, knocked him into the water and then pulled him out again.

"He meant well; but it shows what a state I'm in that I could do it. He forgave me quickly enough, but I couldn't forgive myself. And I only tell you, Medora, to show what a perilous and unnatural frame of mind I've got to. It's all so properly cruel — as if some unseen devil had poked his claws into our affairs and was trying to tear 'em apart. And God knows I'll do any mortal thing that man can do to right it."

She was, however, much more interested in the disaster to Kellock.

"What did he say that made you try to murder him?" she asked.

"I didn't try to murder him — I only shut his mouth. So I don't know what he was going to say. He admitted I was right anyway, and that it was not his place to interfere."

"Nobody's got the right to talk sense to you seemingly."

"I'm not telling you this for you to begin on me again," he said. "I'm telling you to show you what you're doing and what you've done to my temper. If anybody had told me a year ago I'd forget myself and knock a man down for trying to do me a good turn, I'd never have believed

it. Yet such is my state that I did so. And since then I've asked Jordan to speak about the thing and give me any advice he could; but he's told me frankly the time has passed for that. He won't speak now. He forgave me for knocking him into the water; but I can see with half an eye he don't want any more to do with me."

Medora, well knowing why this was, yet pretended not to know.

"You must ask yourself for a reason then and no doubt your conscience will find it, Ned. We must cut a loss before long — you and me — for I don't want to die under this. I can't stand very much more and I dare say you feel the same."

"What d'you mean by 'cut a loss'?" he asked.

But after any pregnant remark of this description, Medora temporised for a time and preferred to be indefinite.

"I don't know what I mean," she answered. "There's times when I wish I was out of it, young as I am. I can suffer and suffer of course. I'm strong and there's no limit to my endurance. But I'm beginning to ask myself 'why?' And for that matter there are one or two others asking me the same question."

"No doubt," he said. "The woman's always right if her face is pretty enough. You've got the art always to be in the right, and there's only one on God's earth, and that's me, who knows you're wickedly in the wrong quite as often as I am. It's your wrongs in other people's mouths that made me do wrong; and when you saw me setting out with all my heart to be patient and win you back again, you set yourself wickedly to work to break down my patience and egg me on. Again and again you've kept at me till I've gone too far and done evil; and then you've run about everywhere and let everybody know what a coward and brute I am."

"That's the way you talk," she said, "and I can only listen with my heart broken. You say these things for no reason but to make me angry, and as to patience, even you

will grant, if there's any justice left in you, that my patience has never broke down from the first. And when the people have talked, I've laughed it off and put a bright face on it."

"Yes, I know that bright face — as though you were saying, 'you see I'm an angel already and only want the wings,'"

"Oh, your tongue!" she answered. "To think that ever you could scourge a good wife with such bitter, biting words."

Then she wept and he cursed and went out. It was a scene typical of others; but from the moment that Medora heard of Kellock's immersion she could not rest until she had let him know she knew it. They were meeting now unknown to Dingle, for though Jordan at first protested against any private conference, Medora quickly over-ruled him. For a month she had made it clear that only the wisdom of Mr. Kellock was keeping her sane; and he believed it. Nor was this altogether untrue, for Medora, now genuinely miserable, began to seek increasing sustenance and support from her old lover.

As in the case of all her other schemes for entertainment and exaltation, she crept to this and let it develop slowly. As the rift between her and Ned grew wider, the gap narrowed between her and Jordan Kellock. At each meeting she decreased the distance between them, yet never by definite word or deed appeared to be doing so. Kellock himself did not realise it. He knew the fact and taxed his own conscience with it at first; but then for a time his conscience left him in doubt as to his duty, until in the light of Medora's increasing sufferings, it spoke more distinctly and chimed dangerously with his inclination.

His whole life was dominated by this great matter. It had become personal and he wrestled with his difficulties by day and night. Medora was one of those women who have a marvellous power of influencing other judgments. She had a fatal gift to waken dislike and distrust of another

person in the mind of a third. She had already created aversion for Ned in the minds of several women; now Jordan, despite his own reason, felt himself beginning to hate Dingle as heartily as Medora appeared to do. He fought this emotion for a time; but found it impossible any longer to maintain an impartial attitude. He told himself that it was only false sentiment to pretend farther impartiality. Justice demanded antagonism to Ned in the future — not because Medora had once been Jordan's whole hope and desire and was now herself unhappy and friendless; but because, as an honest man, Kellock could not longer be impartial.

His views of life were changing; his orderly mind was beginning to suspect that strong action might be necessary. Justice was the word most often on his lips; and yet knowing that he loved Medora, he was intelligent enough to perceive that inclination might be deluding him and making apparently simple what, in reality, was complex. For a time he hesitated; then came a day when he met Medora by appointment and felt it impossible to stand outside her life any longer. She, indeed, forced his hand and made it clear that she was going to take definite steps for her own salvation.

Medora, on her way to Priory Farm one Sunday afternoon, had arranged to meet Kellock at the ruins of the building that gave the farm its name. Here they would be safe from any interruption.

The fragment of masonry crowned Mr. Dolbear's orchard on the summit of the hill that fell into Cornworthy. Here, heaved up against the sky in its ivy mantle, stood the meagre remains of an old priory, one of the smaller houses of the Austin nuns, founded by the Norman lords of Totnes.

It consisted of a great gateway with a roof vaulted, ribbed and bossed, and a lesser entrance that stood to the north of the first. They pierced the mass and bore above them a chamber, of which only the floor and ruined walls

remained. It was reached by a stair, where stone steps wound in the thickness of the wall and opened on to the crown of the ruin fifty feet above. The space aloft was hung with polypody and spleenwort in the chinks of its crumbling mortar, and ivy knots seemed to hold the mass together. A whitethorn had found foothold and rose above the central block of stone. Through a ruined aperture facing east, one might see the orchard sloping to the valley bottom and Cornworthy's scattered dwellings, ascending on the farther hill. The picture, set in the grey granite frame of the priory window, revealed thatched houses grouped closely, with land sweeping upwards on either side, so that the hamlet lay in a dingle between the breasts of the red earth. The land climbed on beyond the village and threw a hogged back across the sky. Here were broad fallows and hedgerows where the leafless elms broke the line with their grey skeletons. To this exalted but secret place, Medora and Kellock were come. He had indeed been there some time when she arrived.

"If you sit here," he said, "you're out of the wind."

"We're safe now," she answered. "And 'twas like you to put yourself about and tramp all this way. But I've got to be terrible careful, Jordan, for if my husband thought I'd any friends working for me and thinking for me, I don't know what awful thing he'd do against me. Nuns used to live here in past ages," she continued. "Oh, my God! I wish I'd been one of them. Then I should have spent my days in peace and be at rest now."

"Sit down and let's use our time as best we can," he advised.

"Time — time — I want for time to end. For two pins I'd jump out of that window and end all time so far as I'm concerned."

"You mustn't talk or think like that, or else I shall fear I can't be any use. I tell you, before God, that my life's all centred in you and your troubles now. I shan't have no peace till you have peace."

"I'll live for you then; and that's about all I want to live for any longer," declared Medora. She felt in a theatrical mood and Ned's recent confession enabled her to speak with a great oncoming of warmth and emotion. Her perception had fastened upon it from the first and measured its value.

And now in the Priory ruin, she made the most of the matter. She had worked it up and found it a tower of strength.

"I know what happened," she said. "You hid it, Jordan, like the man you are; but he told me how he knocked you into the water — cruel devil."

"I'm sorry he told you.— I asked him not to."

"He wanted me to see what he could do, and would do again, and will do again. He properly hates me now, and I shall soon be going in fear of my life — I know that well enough. Not that I care much for my life; but it's awful to live with a tiger."

"You don't mean that, Medora?"

"I do then. He's far ways different from what he was, or what anybody thinks. He may pretend in the works; but he's got the temper of a devil; and sometimes I wish he'd strike and finish me; and sometimes — I'm young and I don't like to think of dying — sometimes I say to myself I'll make a bolt for it and go out into the world and chance it. The world would be kinder than him and anyway it couldn't be crueller."

"This is fearful — fearful," he exclaimed. "I can't stand you saying these things, Medora."

"I wouldn't if they weren't true. It can't go on. I hate to distress you, but there's not a soul in the world cares a button what becomes of me but you. I'm punished for the past I suppose. I deserve it. I took that cruel tyrant when I might have took you — there, don't listen to me. I'm mad to-day." She worked herself into tears and wept convulsively, while he stared helplessly out at the world. His mind moved. He could not stand her con-

tinued suffering, and the confession and assurance of danger inspired him to thoughts of action. Something must be done. She was in evident peril now. Any day might bring the awful news of a disaster beyond repair. Such things were in every newspaper. Not for an instant did he doubt the critical nature of the situation. He hated to think Medora must presently return home to sleep under the same roof as her husband. To his order of mind the situation appealed with the uttermost gravity, for not an inkling of the true Medora tainted his impression and he was as ignorant of the true Ned. He trusted the woman absolutely and he loved her. He steadfastly believed now that the most precious life in the world to him was in torment and in danger. She had, under dreadful stress of emotion as it appeared, more than once expressed her regret at the fatal step in the past. She had mourned frankly and explicitly at taking Dingle, when she might have married Kellock himself.

Here then was the tremendous problem for him; and so pressing and immediate did it appear, that the young man was driven out of his usual level attitude of mind and customary deliberation before the demands of life. For the moment his future ambitions and purposes were lost: he was only urged by the instant necessity to decide what might best be done for Medora's sake. Immense prospects opened before him — knightly deeds, and unconventional achievements calling for great efforts and an indifference to all commonplace, social standards.

He was prepared at a future time to make war upon society for the sake of his class, if the occasion demanded it. He fully intended presently to stand forth with the protagonists of labour and fight for socialism. He anticipated that battle and was educating and priming himself for it. As yet the great revolt belonged to the future and there his ultimate ambition lay; but now an immediate personal appeal confronted him — a matter in which he himself and his own happiness were deeply involved. And

more than himself, for he felt that Medora's future now hung in the balance. Her destiny waited on him.

But he did not tell Medora the result of his reflections. For the moment he bade her be of good cheer and trust him.

While she sobbed, he considered and then, feeling it was time to speak, comforted her.

"I'm glad you've told me all this," he said. "It shows you know where you can put your faith. And since you come to me with it, Medora, I'll make it my business. I'm only a human man and I loved you with all my heart, and I do love you with all my heart still, and now the case is altered. I should never have thought of you again — not in that way — if your married life had turned out all right; but as it's turned out all wrong, then it's up to me to come into your life again. May I do so?"

"You're the only thing in my life," she said, drying her eyes. "Everything else makes me want to end it — yes, I've thought often of that, Jordan. But I'll thankfully put myself in your hands and be patient a bit longer if you tell me to."

"It ain't a case for waiting," he said. "It's a case for doing. I don't know what fear is myself, and more did you till he made you. It looks very much to me as if you'd have to come to me, Medora."

"Oh, my God — could you?"

"Yes, I could, and I will."

"Think of yourself — it's like your bravery to put me first and I'd be your slave and live for you and thank Heaven for its blessings; but I don't want to ruin your life, you good, brave man."

"Nobody can ruin your life but yourself," he answered, "and if I save your life, it won't be to ruin my own. Say you'd like it to be so and leave the rest to me. I mean it, Medora."

A dream that had often filled the girl's waking thoughts suddenly promised to come true and for a moment she was frightened. But only for a moment. She hardly hesi-

tated. Here was romance, fame, the centre of the stage — everything. She knew very well that she could trust him, and if ever she loved and adored the impassive vatman it was at this moment.

She took his hand and pressed her lips to it.

"Like it!" she cried. "It would be heaven on earth — heaven on earth. And God's my judge you shan't repent it. I'll live for you and die for you."

"So be it, Medora. It's done."

He put his arms round her and kissed her. Then both felt a secret desire to be alone and consider the magnitude of the decision. He voiced this wish.

"We'll part now," he said. "You go down to your mother and I'll go home. Be quite easy in your mind and cheerful and content. Leave the rest to me. I'll write to you to-night after I've gone all through it. It ain't so difficult as it sounds if we back each other up properly. I'll see you get the letter to-morrow out of sight of everybody at the works. Be round by the vat house half after eleven. You've got a man to deal with — remember that."

"God bless you," she answered very earnestly. "I'm yours now, and never, never shall you repent of it, Jordan. You can trust me same as I trust you in everything."

They descended the winding stair of the ruin and then parted. Medora went down through the orchard to her mother's home at Priory Farm, while Kellock, climbing through the hedge, presently set his face to Dene and strolled down the Corkscrew Lane with his mind full of the future. He found that thought persisted in drifting away from Medora to her husband. He had just told her that she had a man to deal with; and now it was impressed on Kellock that he, also, had to deal with a man.

Meantime Ned's wife reached the farm, and before she did so, she bathed her eyes at a little stream under the orchard hedge.

She appeared in an unusually contented frame of mind

and Lydia was glad to see her so. Another guest had arrived, for Philander Knox, at Mrs. Trivett's invitation, visited Priory Farm. A friendship had sprung up between him and the widow, for modest though Lydia might be, she could not fail to perceive her company was agreeable to Mr. Knox. He would listen to her opinions in a flattering manner and often expressed surprise to mark how her sense chimed with his experience. His own philosophy and general outlook on life were approved by Mrs. Trivett and on this occasion she had invited him to drink tea at Priory Farm and meet her brother and his family.

He had come and, as all who first penetrated into the life of the farm, found himself bewildered by its complications. The children, the mother, and the helpless father appeared to revolve as a system of greater and lesser planets around the steadfast sun of Lydia. She moved in the chaos as though it were her proper environment — "like a ship in a storm," as Mr. Knox afterwards told her.

Philander had designed to enliven the tea with humorous chatter. He wished to impress Mr. Dolbear and his wife favourably, for he was a sociable person and anxious to increase the number of friends in his new home; but he found a meal at Priory Farm no occasion for much intercourse or advancement of amenities. It proved a strenuous and rather exasperating affair. The children dominated the tea and the tea table. They chattered until they had eaten all they could and departed; then, when the visitor hoped that his opportunity had come, he found, instead, that their mother took up the conversation and discussed the vanished youngsters one by one. She lingered over each as a gardener over his treasures, or a connoisseur over his collection. They were an incomparable group of children, it appeared; and what puzzled Philander was to find that Lydia enjoyed the subject as much as Mary herself. She also knew the children by heart and was evidently devoted to each and all of them.

Tom Dolbear said very little, but enjoyed listening. His brood rejoiced him and he lived now in hope of another boy.

It was Medora who strove to change the subject and allow Bobby and Milly and Clara and Jenny and the rest to drop out of the conversation.

"Mr. Knox will be sick to death of your babies, Aunt Polly," she said.

"Far from it," he declared. "A finer, hopefuller family I never wish to see."

Mr. Dolbear then invited Philander to come into the garden and smoke, but finding the ladies were not prepared to accompany them, he declined.

"If it's all the same to you, I'll rest here until I must get going," he answered. "I'm not used to your hills yet and they weary my legs a lot. Never a great walker — after the way of town birds that have lived all their lives by a tram line."

So he sat and smoked, while Lydia cleared the tea things and Medora helped her.

With Mrs. Trivett there were few opportunities for speech. She came and went and worked. Then the dusk fell and the younger Dolbears were brought in to go to bed. Medora nursed the baby for a time and her mother noticed that she was more than usually cheerful.

Knox then declared that he must be going home and offered to escort Medora. She agreed and having thanked Tom for his hospitality and hoped that he might be privileged to accept it again at some future time, he took his leave. On the way home he spoke to his companion.

"Your mother's a wonderful woman, Mrs. Dingle," he said. "I see these things from the outside and I'm properly astonished at her cleverness."

"So she is," admitted Medora. "But I wish she wouldn't work so hard all the same. She does her day at the Mill and then comes back home and instead of getting her proper rest — well, you see what it is."

"She's like the mainspring of a watch," declared Philander. "'Tis a most delicate contrivance, yet all depends upon it; and if I may say so, as an outsider, you can see with half an eye that her relations depend upon her for everything."

"They do — they do. If anything happened to mother, I don't know what would become of Aunt and Uncle — let alone all the children."

"They don't know their luck," he said, and Medora agreed with him.

"I'm glad you see it. I've often thought that — so have other people. My mother at Priory Farm is like a cheese-cake in a pigstye."

"Strong, but not too strong. She must have great affection for them to stand it."

"Once a man offered for mother," said Medora; "and, at the first whisper of it, Uncle Tom and Aunt Polly pretty well went on their knees to her not to leave them."

"I can well believe it. It didn't come to anything, however?"

"No, no — mother's not for another husband."

"If anything might make her think upon such a change, it would be that household surely."

"No," answered Medora. "It's just that helpless household that would make her sacrifice herself. Duty's her God. She's mother to all those children — more their mother than Aunt Polly in a way — for my aunt is so busy bringing them into the world, that she's got to leave all the rest of the work to other people."

Mr. Knox shook his head.

"It's contrary to nature that such a fine woman as Mrs. Trivett should hide her light under that bushel," he asserted. "It's a very selfish thing to let her slave and wear her fingers to the bone like that; but it often happens so. A husband and wife with a long family always seem to fasten on some good-natured, kindly creature and drag her in their house to be a slave to their children. There's

no selfishness like the selfishness of a pair with a long quiver. They'll fairly batter the life out of anybody who's fool enough to lend a hand; and the more such a person does for the other woman's children, the more she may do. But I should hope your mother was too proud to let herself be used as a nursemaid to her own nieces."

"She's never proud where children are concerned," answered Medora. "She'll stop there till she's worn out."

"A very gloomy picture and I hope you're wrong, Mrs. Dingle," he answered.

CHAPTER X

THE LETTER

IN the vat house there took place the transformation from liquid to solid, from pulp to paper, from a gruel-like, tenuous compound to a substance strong enough to stand strain of many pounds and last for centuries.

Here was the largest building in the Mill — a very lofty, brightly lighted, airy hall, from whose open roof descended electric lights hanging above each vat. A steady whirr and throb of noisy engines made a din here, but the vatmen and their couchers were used to it and could hear themselves speak through the familiar riot.

To the right, elevated under the roof, stood the range of chests — huge, round vessels, like little gasometers, into which the pulp descended from Ned Dingle when he had perfected it. There were eight of these fat monsters ranged in a row, and from them flowed the material to the vats as it was needed. The vats stood on the floor of the chamber — large, wide-mouthed troughs heated by steam from within. For the pulp is warm for the vatman, and some of the finest and most enduring papers demand such a high temperature that an operative's hands are blistered and boiled at his work. Beside each vat is a hand-box of cold water, to dip and refresh the vatman's fingers when the need arises.

Within the vat revolves the "hog," a toothed roller, which keeps the heavy pulp mixed and moving, and prevents any settlement of the fibre.

On stages before the breasts of the vats stood the paper makers, and the wooden bands against which they leaned were polished with the friction of their aprons. Their

tools were two — the mould — a flat, rectangular tray, or sieve, of copper wire as fine as gauze, with the water-mark let in upon it to tell the story of the future paper, and the deckle — a light wood and metal frame of four sides which fitted exactly over the mould and lifted an edge all round it to hold the pulp. The moulds varied from the size of two open sheets of notepaper, to great squares of "double elephant," the noblest stuff the Mill produced. Moulds for these immense pieces once immersed in the pulp, called for great physical power to draw them cleanly and steadily back from the clinging fluid with their weight of material spread upon them.

Kellock was making "double elephant" in a mighty mould. With his thumbs firmly set on the deckle edge, he lowered the tray into the snow-white pulp, sloping it towards him as he did so. He put it in, sank it flat under the pulp and drew it out again with one beautiful, rhythmic movement.

The pulp sucked hard at the great mould, to drag it to the depths, but the man's strength brought it steadily forth; and then he made his "stroke"—a complicated gesture, which levelled and settled the pulp on the mould and let the liquid escape through the gauze. Kellock gave a little jog to the right and to the left and ended with an indescribable, subtle, quivering movement which completed the task. It was the work of two seconds, and in his case a beautiful accomplishment full of grace and charm. He stood easily and firmly while every muscle of breast and arm, back and loins played its appointed part in the "stroke."

Mr. Trood often stood and watched Jordan for the pleasure of the sight. It was the most perfect style he had ever seen. He was a theorist and calculated that Kellock produced the very greatest amount of physical power for the least possible expenditure of muscular loss; while others, who made as good paper as he, squandered thousands of pounds of dynamical energy by a stroke full

of superfluous gesture. But the stroke is never the same in any two vatmen. It develops, with each artificer's knowledge of the craft, to produce that highly co-ordinated effort embraced in the operation of making a sheet of paper.

Mr. Knox operated at the next vat and offered an object lesson. He did the same things that Kellock did; dipped his mould, drew it to him, brought it squarely out, jogged to right and left and gave that subtle, complex touch of completion; yet in his achievement a wholly different display met the observer. It seemed that he performed a piece of elaborate ritual before the altar of the vat.

He bowed his head to right and left; he moved his tongue and his knees; he jerked his elbows and bent his back over the trough as a priest consecrating the elements of some sacramental mass. Then he bowed and nodded once more and the created sheet emerged from his mould. The effect was grotesque, and seen at a little distance a stranger had supposed that Mr. Knox was simply playing the fool for the amusement of his coucher and layer; but in reality he was working hard and making as fine and perfect paper as Kellock himself. His muscles were tuned to his task; he had lifted his sheer weight of forty tons or more by the end of the day and was none the worse for it. Nor could he have omitted one gesture from his elaborate style without upsetting everything and losing his stroke.

So the transformation became accomplished and the millions of linen and cotton fibres scooped on to the mould ran into a thin mat or wad, which was a piece of paper. Why all these fragile and microscopic atoms should become so inter-twisted and mingled that they produce an integral fabric, it is difficult to understand; but this was the result of the former processes; and those to come would change the slab of wet, newly created stuff — now no more than a piece of soaked blotting-paper — to the perfected sheet.

His stroke accomplished and the sediment levelled on the mould, Kellock brought his mould to the "stay"—a brass-bound ledge on his left hand. He lifted the deckle from it as he did so and the full mould was drawn up the stay to the "asp," where his coucher stood. Then Kellock clasped the deckle on to his second mould, now returned from the coucher, and dipped again, while his assistant, taking the full mould from the asp, turned it over on to the accumulating pile of sheets rising on his plank. Then he ran the empty mould back along the bridge to Kellock's hand and drew to himself the next full mould now waiting for him on the stay.

So the process was endlessly repeated, and when the coucher's pile of paper, with woollen welts between each new sheet, had grown large enough, it was removed, drawn away on a little trolley, which ran upon rails down the centre of the vat house, and taken to a press. Here the mass under a steady strain showed that the new sheets were still half water, for a fountain poured and spurted away on every side as the lever was turned.

From this initial pressing each pile came back to the place of its creation and the layer, the third worker in the trinity at each vat, separated the paper from the woollens between the sheets and handed the felts back to the coucher as he needed them for his own task. The three men worked together like a machine with rhythmic action and wonderful swiftness. Then came the interval; the din of the machinery ceased for a while and the vatmen washed their hands.

Each manual craft leaves its own marks, by which one skilled may tell a worker's business, and the paper maker's hands are deeply corned and calloused along the palms and joints. They are his stock in trade and he takes the utmost care of them, for a bleeding corn, or cut, or any wound instantly disables him and he cannot tend the vat until they are sound again.

At this moment Robert Life was out of action, with a

sore on his thumb, and employed for the time at other labour; but he joined the men in the dinner hour and shared a discussion concerning the supreme disaster which may fall to the vatman's lot.

"Did you ever lose your stroke?" asked Life of Mr. Knox. "I've heard of men that did — and never got it back no more."

"May it never happen to you, Robert," answered the elder, "for anything more dreadful and shattering you can't imagine. Yes, I lost my stroke eight years ago; and I can remember every item of the tragedy as if it was yesterday."

"Along of illness?" asked Life, "or your own fault?"

"As I'm among friends," replied Philander, "I'll confess that it was my own fault. I tell you these things as a warning to you younger men. It was whiskey. I'd go on the burst sometimes, though never what you'd call a drinker. But I held an opinion it was better to have a fair wallow in it now and again with teetotal intervals, than to be always drinking, you see; and once I overdid it and lost my stroke. I came to the vat and dipped, but the touch was gone. I tried and failed and washed off again and again; but I couldn't make paper. They came round me and said hopeful things, and I stood like a stuck pig among 'em and the sweat poured down my face. Then I dropped the mould and sneaked away and felt as if the end of the world had come. For I knew bitter well that often and often the stroke once lost is never got back."

"You got yours back, however?"

"In my terror I signed the pledge and promised the Almighty a lot of very fine things if He'd be merciful and let me regain my skill. My self-respect was gone and I'd have grovelled to God, or anybody who could help me. My foreman was a very good chap and understood the nature of the disaster. He cheered me and felt so positive sure I should get it back, that I began to think I

matter should be settled amicably with the dragon. Jordan must do his part; otherwise her rôle would be lessened and reduced below the dignity proper to it.

Since Ned was to blame for everything, reason demanded that retribution fall upon him. Only so could justice — poetical or otherwise — be done. If her departure were not to inflict adequate punishment upon him, then the salt was out of the situation. To Kellock this sounded vindictive, but he could not deny that it was human and natural. He remembered that Medora must not be expected to consider Ned's feelings; though secretly he wished that she had been able to do so.

But Medora was out for blood and her carnivorous instincts extended even to Kellock himself. He too must suffer, that she might complete her performance with due triumph. She pictured Jordan ostracised and turning to her for comfort and support. She saw herself doubted, misunderstood, but presently triumphing over everybody. She imagined Kellock lifted to heights unattainable without her steadfast aid. She felt a boundless confidence in her own intelligence and inspiration to help him. But he must certainly run away with her as a preliminary. He must outrage convention, focus all eyes and appear in the lurid light that beats on people who have the courage to do such things. She told him so and assisted at the simple preliminaries.

He was about to take a fortnight's holiday and it was decided that a day after he left Dene, Medora would join him at Newton Abbot and proceed to London with him.

He agreed to this arrangement as the most seemly, and together they concocted the letter which Mr. Dingle would receive by post on the morning of Medora's disappearance. She invited Jordan to assist her in this composition, but was sorry afterwards that she had done so, for her lover differed from her on certain particulars and deprecated the writing of several things that she desired to write.

They planned the communication in the secrecy of the

Priory ruin on a Sunday afternoon, and it was some time before the man had produced a clean draft for Medora to take away and copy. She wished to insert a demand, couched somewhat insolently, that Mr. Dingle would divorce his wife as swiftly as possible; but Kellock forbade this, because he felt that advice to Ned under such circumstances was undignified and altogether improper.

"You can't do that," he said. "You must be reasonable and take it in a high-minded way. It's for you to tell him what you're going to do and the reason; but it ain't for you to tell him what he's got to do. You can safely leave that to him. You see in these cases, when they get in the papers, that a man and woman always go to an hotel together; and when that's proved, the other man divorces her as a matter of course. That's all there is to it."

At other points also he declined to support Medora's wishes. She had designed some rather flagrant sentiments for this letter and felt that her action needed them. It was to be the letter of her life and, as she said, it had become her first wish to make Dingle feel what he had made her feel. But Kellock was calm and collected upon the subject, and finding composition of the letter awakened very considerably passion in Medora, he begged her to let him draft it and accept his idea of what such a document should be.

"It may be read in open Court some day," he said — a possibility that cheered her.

She agreed therefore and hid her disappointment at what she regarded as a very colourless indictment. Jordan's idea was something as lifeless as a lawyer's letter, but equally crushing in its cold and remorseless statement of fact. Not a shadow of emotion marked it. There was nothing but the statement that finding she failed to please or satisfy her husband, and knowing their continued union could only destroy their happiness and self-control and self-respect, therefore — for both their sakes

— Medora had decided to leave Ned and cast in her lot with Jordan Kellock, who was willing and anxious to make her his wife. Neither anger nor sorrow appeared in this communication as it left Kellock's hands.

She took the letter and thanked him gratefully for helping her. Then they tore up into very tiny fragments the various attempts before the finished article and so parted — not to meet again until they met for ever.

And Medora, when alone, read his letter again and liked it less than before. That night her husband was out and she began her transcription, but when it came actually to copying Kellock's sentences, their icy restraint began to annoy her. She stopped once or twice to ask herself how it was possible for any human being to write in a manner so detached. First she praised him for such amazing power and such remarkable reserve; then she reminded herself that this was to be her letter to her husband, not Jordan's. Jordan proposed to write himself from London. She wondered a great deal what Jordan's letter would be like. If the letter he had written for her made her shiver, surely the letter he wrote for himself would be a freezing matter. She told herself that Kellock was a saint. She felt uneasily proud of him already. She kept his heroism in her mind, and felt proud of herself, too, that such a man was willing to let her share his future, brilliant as it must certainly be.

But the letter — her letter — stuck. She began arguing with herself about it. She told herself that it was not her style and Ned would know it. Obviously Ned must not suppose that Kellock had written the letter. She noted down a few sentences of the sort of letter she would have written without anybody's assistance — the letter she had dreamed of writing — and it pleased her much. She found such a flow of words as seemed proper to the tremendous occasion. They glittered and flashed like knives. Invective and self-justification shared the burning pages. She surprised herself at the force and vigour

of the phrases. Turning again to Kellock's composition, she now found it hopelessly inadequate as compared with her own. It was true that she had promised Jordan to post it; but she changed her mind and determined to despatch her own production, as better suited to the parting, far more forcible, far more dramatic and far more the sort of letter she pictured Ned as showing to other people, after the blow had fallen.

She paltered with the situation to the extent of writing another letter embodying a part of Kellock's. And then she copied this, and copied it again. She destroyed the debris, including Kellock's original draft, and left one letter perfect in every way—an exceedingly outrageous production.

She sealed it up and next morning assured herself that, for all practical purposes, it was the letter Kellock had designed. From a decision to tell him that she had added a phrase or two, she doubted whether it was worth while. Finally she determined not to tell him that she had altered the letter.

"It's no good making needless complications," she thought.

She was very happy and excited. She lived in a dream for a week, and the reality of the things she had decided to do lay altogether outside her calculations and anticipations.

Probably her greatest joy at this juncture centred, not so much in the happiness she had planned for herself and Jordan, as the thought of what people would say at Dene about their flight. She felt that to be invisible among her acquaintances on the morning of her departure, would have been even a greater delight than the first day in London with her future husband.

CHAPTER XI

LYDIA'S DAY

LYDIA TRIVETT always remembered the seventeenth day of March as the most remarkable anniversary in her career. For upon that day she experienced such a succession of extraordinary and unexpected shocks and strains, that, looking back afterwards, she marvelled how any human mind was strong enough to endure them and not break down under such massive and accumulated provocation.

Enough adventures overtook Lydia on the seventeenth of March to suffice a well balanced woman for ten years.

The day was Sunday and opened without incident; but hardly had Mrs. Trivett got her brother's children off to church, when Tom Dolbear descended from his wife with the news that he was going for the doctor and calling for the nurse.

"To-day makes or mars me," he said. "If 'tis another girl, Lydia, I don't know how I'll bear up against it."

"Be hopeful," she urged. "There's a law called the law of averages, so Mr. Knox tells me, and according to that, a boy's very nearly certain."

But Mr. Dolbear did not understand.

"Tell the man he's a fool then," he answered as he laced up his boots. "Children can't be regulated by law, though it's just like the cussed conceit of lawyers to think they can. And God help us if they could ordain these things, for they'd drive tidy hard bargains I'll warrant."

"'Tis a law of nature, not of lawyers," explained his sister. "I don't know nothing about it myself, but the

common sense is that after such a lot of girls, you've a right to expect a boy, and no doubt so it will be."

He departed and Lydia went to Mary. She was in no way concerned for her, because Mrs. Dolbear managed these matters very successfully and with the least possible trouble to herself. Nature invariably smiled upon her and her present anxiety merely echoed her husband's.

"God send it's a man-child, or else I shan't hear the last of it," she murmured.

All was ready to welcome the new-comer and in half an hour Mrs. Dolbear's ally, Mrs. Damerell from the village, joined her. The children came home from church and Lydia gave them their dinner and told them that a new brother or sister was about to arrive. They shared the family ambition and prayed Aunt Lydia to let it be a brother.

"I think it will be," she said, "but that's for God to decide."

"Nobody don't want no more girls," declared the eldest daughter, and her aunt told her not to speak so.

"'Tisn't what we want; 'tis what our Father in Heaven wants, Milly. And if He sends father and mother a little girl, we must welcome it just so hearty as you and your sisters were welcomed in your turn."

Mr. Dolbear was restless, but he ate as good a dinner as usual and then, having heard that all was going well, went into the orchard with his pipe. The children were despatched to Sunday school and presently an old doctor arrived, visited Mary and then joined the farmer under the apple trees.

"A matter of form," he said. "I come as a matter of form, Tom."

Mr. Dolbear enquired as to the law of averages, and the medical man advised him to set no faith upon it.

"When you're dealing with the statistics and the population as a whole, such things work out pretty regular, I grant you," he explained, "but when you're dealing with

one woman, who has got into a habit, then it's not wise to indulge in general principles. Habit is stronger than anything but death, Tom; and though you may fairly hope for a son, I may say in sporting language that the betting is a shade against."

"You think 'twill be a girl, doctor?"

"I do — not long odds, but about two to one."

Within doors Lydia was standing reading a letter with shaking hands, while silent, strained, staring, humped up in the chair opposite her, sat Ned Dingle. He had come from Ashprington, burst in upon her while she was helping a maiden to wash up, ordered her to follow him to the parlour and then broken the fatal news.

"She's gone — run away — Medora," he said. "She rose afore I was awake this morning, and when I came down house, I got this to breakfast. The post-man brought it, just as I was wondering what the mischief had become of her. Read it."

He handed Lydia Medora's epistle and sat and watched her while she read it. He did not interrupt but kept his eyes on her face and gnawed his knuckles as she read.

When she had finished, she let the fatal sheet fall on the ground and took off her glasses. Then she bent down and picked up the letter.

"A cheerful, damned sort of thing for a husband to get," said Ned. "Going to marry Kellock, you see."

"As to that, she'll marry Kellock when you please and not before," answered Lydia quietly. "I don't know what to say to you, Ned. This is beyond anything. I never guessed for a moment she'd sink to such wickedness. God's my judge I didn't know she was having any truck with that man."

The nurse looked in.

"Where's doctor?" she asked.

"In the orchard with Mr. Dolbear," answered Lydia. Mrs. Damerell departed and she turned again to Ned.

"It's an insulting letter. I'm terribly shocked. I

don't pretend to understand the rising generation, my dear. After they grow out of childhood, they get too deep for me. But I couldn't have thought any daughter of mine and my husband's would ever have done this."

"It's all very plain to understand now," he answered. "She wanted that man and she couldn't chuck me without some sort of excuse, so she worked up this idea, that I was a brute and tormenting her to death and so on. Then she made Kellock believe it; and though he kept perfectly straight, so far as I know, while he thought Medora was happily married to me, as soon as she began about me being a cruel devil that made her life hell and all that, then Kellock no doubt believed her. Why, he went so far as to lecture me a while back along, and I knocked him in the water for doing so. I'll swear he had no thought to run away with her then — unless he's the biggest traitor that ever walked the earth. But he ain't that sort. I simply can't see that man doing this job."

"I'm glad you can keep so cool and sensible, Ned. Nothing's gained by getting angered, though I'm angered I promise you, and anger's a righteous thing sometimes. I'm struck to the heart over this; and if I'd thought for an instant 'twas in her wicked mind even as a shadow, I'd have given you due notice. But I never dreamed it. I've talked to her again and again and tried to show her sense; but she's doomed herself by her own nature."

"The mischief is I couldn't read her," answered Mr. Dingle. "Not that I didn't at first. She married me for love — no other reason — and for the first six months — nay ten — of our life together, I read her like a book. But after that she changed. And she got stranger and stranger, as we went on, till be damned if I didn't find myself living with a different woman! And, mind this, I was never rough nor harsh to her, till she'd egged me on to being so. I put up with a devil of a lot and kept my temper in a manner that surprised myself if not her; but

she was out to make me lose it, because, till I did so, the things she wanted to happen couldn't. And after a bit I did lose it. Who wouldn't? Yet God's my judge I was never very much enraged with her, because I always felt she was play-acting and making believe half the time; and that had a funny side; and sometimes it amused me more than it angered me. And above that was the sure knowledge that any open quarrel would be an unmanly thing and might lead to lasting trouble; and above that, again, was the fact that I loved Medora well. I never ceased to love her in her maddest tantrums.

"Then comes this letter, and I can assure you it's a bolt from the blue. And yet it's all unreal somehow — I can't grasp it home to me. I can't believe it. I could almost laugh and say to myself it's a dream and I shall wake up alongside Medora any minute."

His face was full of pain, as yet he showed more stunned surprise than anger.

"I knew her so well — think of it," he went on. "She must have her bit of fun and her bit of flattery; and she got both with me. But him — good God Almighty — she turned him down once for all eighteen months ago, and she told me why in very good plain words. And now she's gone to him. Yet he's not changed. He can't change. There's men I can see her with perhaps — though none as easy as I can see her with me — but him — Kellock — he'll never satisfy her. It's impossible."

"You're right there," said Lydia. "My daughter's not the sort to be content to shine with her husband's reflected light. The little fool wants to be somebody herself. It's vanity quite as much as wickedness has made her do this. But she won't shine with Kellock anyway; and after doing such a hateful, wicked thing, he won't shine either. His light's out now in the eyes of all self-respecting, honourable people."

"No, it isn't," he answered. "It will make a deuce of

a lot of difference to Medora, but not to him, because he's the sort that don't let any outward thing alter their inward disposition. He's thought it all out. He knows there's not half a dozen men in the kingdom can make paper like him, and so he's safe and beyond any punishment whatever he does. He's done nothing the law can touch him for. And when I touch him, the law will be on his side against me."

Ned was still amazingly calm. Indeed his self-control astonished her.

"So far I don't know what's happening," he proceeded. "I don't know where they are, or what they have planned. I'm keeping an open mind. I shall see him presently. I may swing for him yet; or I may find — Lord knows what I may find. It's all hidden so far."

"I feel as if I was twenty years older for this news — older and broken too," said Lydia. "If there was time, I'd weep a river for this, and I shall yet; but not now. There's a baby coming upstairs, and you can't think of two things to once and do 'em both justice. I'll see you to-morrow in the dinner hour. Perhaps you'll hear more by then. Kellock was a man very nice on speech, as well as manners. He'll feel it's up to him to — there, what am I saying? — the strangeness! Well may you say as though you was in a dream. So I feel; and I won't throw up hope either. God often waits till the very last minute afore He throws the light of truth into a mind. He may prevail with Medora, and so I wouldn't say nothing yet — nothing to nobody."

"I'm dazed," he told her. "I scarce know what I've been doing since breakfast. Here's your children coming back from Sunday school. I'll be gone. It's a bad job — an ugly, cruel job; but grasp hold of this tight, and whether you tell or whether you do not tell, remember the fault weren't mine. I never treated her bad, not yet bullied her, nor played tyrant upon her; and if she said I

did, she was a liar; and if ever I handled her rough, I was sorry after; and the worst ever I did weren't a twentieth part of what she deserved."

"I know all that," said Lydia; then the children clattered down the passage with shrill questions: "Be the baby come?" "Be it a boy?" "Oh, say 'tis a boy, Aunt Lydia!"

Ned went off through the orchards, while his mother-in-law, scarce knowing what she did, gave the children their tea.

Under the trees Mr. Dolbear padded up and down. He was in no fear for Mary, but suffering the extremity of anxiety as to the sex of the coming child.

Ned told him the news.

"My wife's run away from me, Tom," he said.

"Have she? Fancy! The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the Name. I never did like Medora, and you'll bear me out. Where's she run then?"

"I don't know. She's gone with Jordan Kellock, the vatman."

"God'll see to it — trust Him, and don't take the law in your own hands."

They talked for ten minutes; then a child appeared at the gate by the house. It was Milly, Mr. Dolbear's favourite.

"The news be come," cried Tom, and ignoring Dingle, he hastened to his daughter, while Ned departed. The first shock was over and his deep disgrace and bitter wrong began to grind into him. So far he had kept amazingly temperate. But he was to experience many moods before he slept that night.

Meantime Milly in tears broke bad news to the farmer.

"There's another beastly little girl come," she piped, and her father gazed tragically at her and turned silently to his home. Lydia met him at the door.

"Did Ned tell you of this awful misfortune?" she asked.

"No," he answered. "Milly told me, and I say here and now that it's an outrage and undeserved."

"I'm thinking of Medora, Tom."

But Dolbear had no room in his mind for Medora. The children were all cast down and some wept.

"I must go and comfort the woman," said Mary's husband. "She'll feel this only less than I do. And I should like to hear parson justify it — not that he could. Just a piece of saucy cruelty against them who've done nought to deserve it. That's what it is."

"Don't you go souring her mind against the baby," urged Lydia. "That wouldn't be kind after all her trouble and patience. Say you're pleased, Tom, and cheer her up."

"'Twould only be a lie if I did and nobody would know it better than her. I'll go up and forget myself and comfort her as best I can — and God's my judge, Lydia, I won't have no more children."

"Don't you say what you'll be sorry for."

"I mean it. Them that plant the seed have a right to call the crops in my opinion; and there did ought to be fair give and take between the creature and his Creator. There weren't no rhyme nor reason in planting another girl on me, and I ain't going to be the plaything of the Almighty no more — and more shan't Mary. We've done — through no fault of our own neither."

He ascended to a weary and apologetic partner who shared his view of the situation.

"It's the living daps of the last," she said. "A nice little, heavy girl; but I can't do no more, Tom; I can't fight against Providence."

"No you can't," he declared, "and what's more, you shan't. You've broke the law of averages by all accounts; and that's about the limit. And Somebody shall see that two can play at that game in the future. Providence have shut down on the boys; and I'll shut down on the girls. It ain't going to be all one way."

Mrs. Dolbear shed tears, but she shared his indignation and did not blame his attitude to the baby.

Mrs. Damerell was shocked.

"I wouldn't open my mouth so wide if I was you, farmer," she answered. "Who are you to dictate what you want? Here's a fine female child come into the world, to be your right hand and the joy of your life for all you know to the contrary. I'm sure I never yet saw a pair receive a child in such a way, since the day that Honor Michelmores got one with no thumbs and cursed God. But in your case, Nature have always done her part to the full, and you're saying things you didn't ought, Mr. Dolbear."

"If you're so pleased with it, you'd better take it home with you," he answered. "It never can be no favourite of mine now, and I won't pretend different."

Beneath Lydia was seeking to allay the disappointment of the family.

"I shouldn't wonder if she was the nicest little sister any of you ever had, my dears. A proper little fairy very likely, and the one you'll all like best."

They vowed it never could be and Milly said: "Father hates her a'ready, so I be going to do the same."

Then Mrs. Trivett preached very seriously against this inhuman spirit and was still preaching when there came Philander Knox.

"I thought the better the day the better the deed," he explained, "and I hoped your young people would be going to church after their tea, so I might have a yarn with you."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure. Perhaps you'll be able to distract my brother's mind a thought. He's very much under the weather. And I dare say it would be a good thing if a few of you was to go to church."

Milly, who loved church, but did not often attend evening service, was pleased at this plan and she took her younger sisters with her. Tom came down, smoked a pipe

and grew calmer in the company of Mr. Knox; Lydia put the other children to bed — for the present the penultimate baby was in her room — and then Philander's opportunity arrived, and after Mr. Dolbear had gone up the village, he enjoyed Lydia's society for half an hour before interruption came.

She told him what had happened to Medora and he wondered, while he discussed the tragedy, whether it might not, after all, help rather than hinder his own designs.

"At first sight," he said, "the human instinct is always to say that anything out of the common must be wrong; but that's only our natural cowardice and love of letting life alone. And I, for one, am not going to say that because a woman changes husbands, or a man changes wives, it follows they are doing the wrong thing. Often a pinch of pluck will break a partnership to the advantage of both parties, and it's a darned sight better than shaking their chains and making a nuisance of themselves in the face of the people. An unhappy marriage is a bad advertisement for the institution, and a man like me, who believes heart and soul in marriage, is always sorry to see an unhappy marriage go on."

"But if every young pair who quarrelled before their first child came was to part like this, the world couldn't go on. Those that God have joined let no man put asunder."

"No man can," he answered. "You needn't worry about that. If God joins up a man and woman, man can't put 'em asunder, nor yet anything else. They're one body and soul till death parts 'em. But because a pair marry, it don't follow that God have had anything to do with it. There's a lot of other institutions besides God. We make mistakes in all walks of life and in none oftener than in marriage. And in my opinion it's one of the things, like any other partnership, that God don't specially take under His protection. Love is a trick of nature, and Nature says to herself, 'if at first you don't

succeed, try again.' Nature's trying again with your daughter, Mrs. Trivett."

She sighed.

"I wish to Heaven as Nature had left her alone then, for she was married to a good man, and whatever she feels about him, there's no doubt he was ready and willing enough to love her to the end of his life."

"It often happens," he answered, "and of course that sort of parting's the saddest, where one party don't want to part and t'other does. When both are fed up, then they can break loose with self-respect and mutual applause; but if one's got to run away from the other, then the case is altered. But no doubt Ned Dingle will rise to it. He's clever enough to know that it's useless keeping a wife if she's breaking her heart to escape. The fact that Medora has done this venturesome act and gone to another man, will show your son-in-law the game's up. If she'd just gone off on her own, he might have hunted after her and won her back perhaps — if he wanted her back; but since she's gone with somebody else and is ready to face all that means — well, that leaves her husband in no doubt of her meaning, don't it?"

"None whatever," admitted Lydia. "You've got a brain, Mr. Knox, so perhaps you'll tell me what you think of Kellock. She was divided between 'em in the past and decided for Ned — wisely as I thought, because it always seemed to me that Jordan Kellock was too wrapped up in reading and learning and high views about labour to make a young woman happy. If you'd asked me, I should have said it weren't in him to run away with another man's wife. I should have thought he was such a well-drilled man in his mind that he'd have stopped loving Medora the moment he heard she was going to marry Dingle."

"Kellock," answered Philander Knox, "is all you say; but he's young and he's got a romantical turn, though it takes the practical shape of wanting to better the world

at large. That's all true, but he's short of thirty still, and, under thirty, you never can say with certainty a man is complete in his make-up. He loved her, and if he thought she'd took a fatal mistake and married the wrong one, and if she told him so, as no doubt she did, then it's not out of his character to find himself loving her again. And the instinct to fight the cause of the weak, which is a part of the man, wouldn't be any less strong because he happened to love the weak party for herself. So it all fits in very natural so far, and your daughter may trust Kellock to champion her and be very tender and jealous and all that. He'll treat her well without a doubt."

"And what sort of a husband will he make for my girl?"

"That I can't say," answered Knox. "For the reason that I don't know what your girl wants. If Ned didn't suit her, then as Kellock's just the opposite of him in every way, perhaps he will."

"Ned did suit her — that's the shocking thing," declared Lydia. "He suited her so perfectly that he suited her too well, if you can understand that. There was all sunshine and no shade, and Medora, so far as I can see, instead of blessing her good luck got sick of so much uneventful happiness, like a child gets sick of too much barley-sugar. Then she turned by a sort of restless instinct to find a bit of change. Of course she's said for months that she was miserable; but she invented most of her misery in my opinion."

"Very interesting, and no doubt you know. But we middle-aged people can always see the young looking for trouble. 'Tis part of their natural curiosity and daring. They don't know they're born in fact, and that's a thing you can't teach a person. Each has got to learn it themselves. And some never do. We'll watch and pray, Mrs. Trivett. That's about all we can do for

the young. And now I'll tell you what I came about. And I'll also promise that, so far as it lies in my power, I'll befriend Medora if she comes back here."

"She can't come back — she can't do that."

"Leave her — you never know what the young can do, and what they can't do. I'm here about you, not her. We've not known each other above six months, but knowledge of our fellow creatures ain't a matter of time. 'Tis understanding of character and like to like and so on. Another, finding you in trouble to-day, would hold off no doubt. But, just because you are in trouble, I'm going to hold on and say what I came to say. I respect and admire you very much out of the common, Mrs. Trivett, and I feel that it's a crying shame to see you in this rabbit hutch, living the life of a maid-of-all-work for other people, when you ought to be the mistress of your own home. I say you ought to have a man to work for you, and look after you, and not let you toil and wear your fingers to the bone, either here, over your brother's children, or in the rag shop. Your sense of justice must cry out against it, and so it ought and I feel it very much to heart. You drew me, from the first minutes I set eyes on you, for I saw all that you were and found, as I knew you better, you were even better than I thought. And, in a word, if you'll throw over these Dolbears and come to me, I can promise a very faithful and friendly husband and one who will make it his first business and pleasure in life to give you a good time. 'Tis thought silly of a man over fifty-two to speak of love; but rest assured that such a man knows a darned sight more about it than green youth. You've had a good husband and I've had a good wife, according to her lights; then what's to prevent us joining forces if you think half so well of me as I do of you?"

Lydia was inconsequent.

"If anybody had told me when I opened my eyes this morning what the day was going to bring forth," she

said, "God's my judge I shouldn't have had the heart, or courage to put on my clothes."

"Yes, you would," he answered. "You're the sort to meet all that comes steadfast and patient, with the pluck of an army. You'd have rose up as usual. And what about it?"

"Nothing on earth is farther from my thoughts at present than a second," she answered. "I regard myself as an old woman."

"Only because you live among all these messy children. You're not old: you're in your prime, and if you was to rest your flesh a bit, instead of wearing it out morning, noon and night, you'd very soon be surprised to find what a comely creature you'd find yourself."

"That's all past. Duty is duty and God's found the work to do."

"God's also found me," answered Mr. Knox, "and you must weigh me along with everything else. And if, as I see in your face, your inclination is to say 'no,' then I beg you'll not say it — at any rate not this evening. You're far too nice to decide the future career of a fellow creature, let alone your own, without turning it over fairly in your mind. I didn't ask you to say 'yes,' all of a minute, because this is sprung upon you — you expected no such thing; but though I didn't count on 'yes,' Lydia, I'm equally determined not to hear 'no.' So you can think all round it, and I wish you'd got more time to do so. However you're a fair woman — fair and just to all but yourself — so I very well leave it at that for the present."

"To think a good-looking, clever man like you should have looked at a little every-day woman like me!" she said.

"You won't be every day no more if you're Mrs. Knox," he promised. "Far from it. You should go in a carriage and pair if it could be done, and though I can't promise that, I can promise a nice house, and a bit of

garden, and a professed cook to look after the kitchen and do your bidding. Think upon it."

"Don't hope, however; 'tis a very unlikely thing that I should change my state with so many calls."

"Come to your own conclusions anyway," he said. "I know what human nature is very well and I know what you are in this house. But don't let selfishness on the part of other people decide you against me. That would be very unfair to me, and you can't be unfair to a man that thinks of you as I do."

"I'll do nothing unfair to you, Mr. Knox. In fact I'll do nothing at all for the present. My sister-in-law mustn't hear a word in her weak state, or the consequences might be bad; and my brother's cast down also, and so am I. In fact trouble's everywhere."

"Regard me as the silver lining to the cloud then. I quite see it was a bit of a staggerer this coming to-day of all days; but at any rate you know now you've got a valuable friend. And such I shall remain, whatever happens. Now, no doubt, you're itching to get supper for all them brats, so I'll go my way. And I pray God's blessing on your thoughts, Lydia — I do indeed."

"Thank you," she replied. "Yes, you go now. I can't stand no more, else I shall break down — a thing I'm never known to do. I dare say I'll see you at the works to-morrow. And don't say nothing about Medora."

"Trust me," he answered. "My one hope will be to help you in that quarter if I can. Don't you despair. It may straighten out yet, though where two men and a woman's the matter, there's seldom more than one chance in fifty that things will come right."

CHAPTER XII

MEDORA'S NIGHT

IN a rowan-red gown and her best hat, Medora had left Ashprington while it was yet twilight of morning. She carried only a light travelling basket made of cane, for she took little more than the clothes on her back. She proposed to begin the new life in new clothes, which would be bought in London. Even her wedding ring was left behind and she told herself that she would not wear such a thing again until Jordan Kellock set it on her finger.

She met him as they had arranged, at Newton Abbot, and together they proceeded to London. He was serious on the journey and extraordinarily solicitous for Medora's mental and physical comfort. She told him all that she had done and he explained his own purposes. At Bristol he got her a cup of tea and a piece of cake. They had enjoyed privacy so far; but now others entered the carriage and they could talk no more. So Mrs. Dingle fell back on her thoughts and pictured the sequence of events at home, while Kellock read a newspaper. Her heart beat high when London was reached and the train plunged into Paddington.

"I'm afraid we must practice a little guile, Medora," he said as they walked down Praed Street, Jordan carrying their luggage; "but as little as possible."

They proceeded to Edgeware Road, where the man knew a small hotel.

"Keep on your gloves for the moment," he advised. "The first thing I shall do to-morrow will be to buy you a wedding ring."

"We are married," declared Medora. "Already I feel as properly married to you as I can be."

But he soared to no such imaginative heights.

"Marriage is marriage," he answered. "We must possess our souls in patience."

He spoke as though he were not going to find this difficult. Indeed he was nervous and anxious to have certain preliminaries completed. At the "Edgeware Arms" Kellock asked for two bedrooms with a firm voice and registered their names as "Mr. and Mrs. Jordan Kellock, from Totnes, Devonshire."

They went upstairs together, led by a boy who carried Medora's travelling basket and the man's leather portmanteau. The bedrooms adjoined and Kellock invited Medora to choose her room. He then left her luggage there and went into the other himself.

She unpacked with some emotion and wondered when he would come in to see her; but he did not come. She put on a pair of shoes and a white blouse. She washed and did her hair again, for it was untidy. Then she sat down to wait. Presently he knocked at the outer door.

"Are you coming to supper?" he asked, and she rose and joined him.

"Are you rested? I'm afraid you must be sinking."

"I'm quite all right. Is your room nice?"

"Very comfortable. You don't mind them adjoining?"

"Why should I?"

"There's certainly no reason," he admitted.

They supped together cheerfully and he made her drink hot soup. He was a teetotaller but Medora asked for some beer.

"I dare say I'll get used to giving it up soon," she said. "In fact I mean to. Where I can be like you, Jordan, I shall be. But I'm used to a glass for supper and I'm extra tired to-day."

He ordered a small bottle of Bass and under the stimu-

lant she grew happy and confidential. She talked a great deal.

"I didn't think I should have been able to eat a bit," she said, "but I never enjoyed a meal more."

"Nor me," he answered. "When you've done, we'll go and sit in the writing room. That'll be empty, and we can chat. But I know you're dog-tired, so I shan't let you stop up long."

The smoking room looked more attractive to Medora. There was a haze in the air and a tang of cigar about the portal. A chink of glass and sound of laughter might be heard there. She would have liked to be seen sitting by Mr. Kellock in some comfortable corner, while he too smoked a cigar and drank some whiskey and soda perhaps, or one of the bright drinks in very little glasses. But she blamed herself for the wish. There must be no small fancies of this sort. Her triumph would never be displayed in public smoking rooms. She must realise that from the first. As though to mark the austere heights on which henceforth she would move, Jordan led the way to an empty writing room silent and dark. A decayed fire was perishing in the grate. He fumbled for an electric light and turned it on. Then he shut the door and drew an arm chair to the remains of the fire for her. He took a light chair and placed it opposite her.

"Here we can talk in private," he said.

She looked at a sofa, but he failed to perceive her glance.

"To-morrow," he told her, "I begin the day by writing to Mr. Trenchard and your husband."

"For God's sake don't call him that any more. You'll be telling me I'm Mrs. Dingle in a minute."

"As a matter of fact you are, Medora. We mustn't dream beautiful dreams yet. We've got to face reality till we alter reality."

"My life's not been reality so far — only a nightmare."

"Reality is nothing more than a question of time now. In fact you may say it's begun, Medora."

"Yes, indeed, Jordan dear. You can't guess what heaven it is to me to know I'm in your strong hands. I've come to rest after being tossed by cruel storms — to rest in your arms."

"I hope I'll prove all you think me. I want to have the future clear and the past off our minds; and then we'll just enjoy ourselves and have a bit of good fun."

She wondered what his idea of good fun would be. But she was not yet feeling much like fun. While the evening wore on and the fire went out and Kellock's level voice proceeded to indicate the future as he hoped and desired it to be, she began to feel cold and depressed.

"I shall inform Mr. Trenchard that I will return, or leave as he prefers. It really doesn't matter to me; because, thank God, my ability makes me independent. Of course if you don't want to go back, I shouldn't think of doing so; but you do want to."

"Yes, I want to. I like the country."

"That will mean that your — that Mr. Dingle leaves."

"So he should; but he's just the man not to see it."

"Obviously he must leave, or I must. I bear him a very bitter grudge for his cruelty to you, and I'm not going to pretend that I care about his future."

"I should hope not, Jordan."

"Far from it. Wrong done to you was wrong done to me. At least that is what it amounts to now. My feeling to Dingle will be the feeling of the strong to the weak, Medora. He must go if you wish to stop. Of course I've got very different ideas from him."

"I should hope you had."

"For instance, I wouldn't let my wife work as he let you work."

She yawned presently and he exclaimed that he must not keep her up any longer.

"You put everything out of your mind and go to

bed," he advised. "Would you like a cup of tea or anything before you go?"

"Not if you wouldn't," she said.

But he explained that he never took anything after his supper, and that the lighter his last meal, the better he slept.

So she left him. He clasped her right hand in both his and shook it affectionately for some seconds; but he did not kiss her.

"I shall turn in pretty soon myself," he said. "But it's not above ten o'clock yet. I'll stop here and draft out those letters — that'll save time to-morrow."

She went upstairs and presently, for curiosity, tried the door between her room and his. It was open and she went in. Through a Venetian blind slants of electric light from the street illuminated the chamber; but that did not show enough, so Medora turned on the light and looked for evidence of Jordan. They were starkly simple: a brush and comb on the dressing table, a shaving brush and a tooth brush and a nail brush and sponge on the washstand. Upon his bed lay a night shirt and against the door hung his overcoat and black squash hat and dark blue silk neckerchief. A few newspapers and books on economic and industrial subjects he had also brought. In a drawer of a chest of drawers were some collars and socks and two blue flannel shirts.

What Medora expected to see she did not know, but what she did see depressed her. She put out the light and went back to her own room. Then all manners of doubts and wonders occupied her mind and her first purpose was to undress and get into bed as fast as possible before the man came upstairs. She hesitated about locking the door between them and decided to do so. His importunities would be rather delightful and human. For she felt that the humanity of Jordan was what she hungered and thirsted for. She adored his chivalry and wonderful tenderness and forethought; she perceived what a

white knight he was — all these manifestations were duly recorded and valued. But now — surely it was her turn to reward a spirit so rare and worthy of reward?

She was soon in bed with her light out; and presently she heard him arrive and saw a streak of illumination beneath the intervening door. She listened and heard him take off his boots and put them outside his door. But at last he flicked off his light and pulled up the Venetian blind. She remembered that he had told her he always slept with his blind up.

Her heart beat hard now and her ears strained for the next sound. It was not, however, the door-handle that creaked, but Kellock's bed. There was a squeak and jolt followed by silence.

The unwonted noise of the streets kept Medora awake and she became the prey of thoughts that grew more and more unpleasant. A brief peace sank over London, but bells beating the hour would not let her sleep. During the small hours and with vitality at low ebb, her mind sank into a region of nervous gloom. For the moment her triumph became divested of all its brilliance and there was thrust upon her very forcibly the other aspect of such action as she had taken. She considered her mother and Ned. For some reason, and not a little to her annoyance, thought took the bit in its teeth respecting Ned and absolutely refused to dwell on the black side of him. As a matter of fact Medora proved too weary to pretend any longer. She was now disarmed; the sleight of her own creation, which had risen as a sort of shield between her and reality, for the present fell; and she found that her reflections obstinately refused to follow the line she had of late persisted in. The mind that she had drilled to think as she wished, for once in a way threw off allegiance and refused to be loyal to Medora's impersonation. Instead it stumbled painfully but with determination along the way of truth and reduced her to despair by persistently bringing before her vision pictures of good days

with Ned and memories from the past wherein he figured to advantage.

She tossed and turned, grew very sorry for herself and finally centred her thoughts on Kellock. She considered his chaste attitude to the present situation rather absurd. Then she fell to wondering whether this delicate matter did not more properly belong to her. He was so high-minded where she was concerned — a miracle of tender refinement. For a long time she resisted an inclination to go to him, but presently persuaded herself that it would be the truest kindness to do so. Her own nature prompted her strongly to seek comfort from him, for she was exceedingly miserable now and awake with a hateful alertness. She thought it was more than probable that he lay on the other side of the wall similarly enduring. Surely if she went to him, an everlasting bond would be established between them and their union sealed gloriously by her initiative. He was just that subtle man to appreciate such an evidence of her perfect trust. Still some voice in her argued contrariwise and not until a clock chimed three did Medora decide. Then she made a dash for him.

She unlocked the door between their rooms, opened it gently and found Kellock lying peacefully asleep with the wan light from his bared window irradiating the chamber. The window was open and the room felt exceedingly cold. She had not wakened him and for a moment she hesitated and even went so far as to creep half-way back to the door.

He looked very pale and very handsome asleep. He slumbered easily with a pleasant, happy expression upon his face. She fastened upon it and told herself that he was glad to have won her and more than strong enough to keep her for ever. She longed to be close to him and feel his arms round her. A man so strong and physically splendid could not lack for fire. It only awaited Medora's awakening, and she was in a mood to wake it. If she was

to sleep at all that night, she must sleep with him, she told herself.

Perhaps even now a whisper warned her; but she was beyond warning. She wanted him and bent down and kissed him on the mouth.

"My darling dear, I can't sleep alone," she said. "Why didn't you come to me?"

He started up instantly, and she saw him break from sleep to waking and stare with half-seeing eyes as round as an owl's. He grew exceedingly white and his jaw fell. From an expression of content and peace, his countenance became miserable and rather idiotic. It is not too much to say that as soon as he found himself awake with Medora in her nightdress beside him, he grew frightened.

"Good God — what's the matter?" he asked in a hollow voice.

"I'm the matter," she answered. "I can't be martyred all night. I want to come and sleep beside you."

Then his face grew suddenly red with a wave of blood and he was as wide awake as Medora herself.

He did not mince his words.

"Go back to bed, Medora, at once! You don't know what you're doing. You're dreaming — sleep-walking — surely. You mean it innocently. I'll explain in the morning. Please, please go — instantly, Medora."

She stared at him, stood upright and did not immediately obey his command to depart.

"We don't want to look back at this great thing we have done and feel any shadow upon it," he declared. "We want to be able to look into each other's faces and know that we have nothing whatever, before God or man, to reproach ourselves with. We've started on the highest plane and we'll keep on the highest plane. You understand me. Indeed the beautiful thing has always been that we do understand each other so perfectly. So — please, Medora."

She did not answer, but obeyed. Burning and shaking

to her very bones she vanished and slammed the door behind her; then she leapt into her bed and huddled under the clothes in a fury. But she did not hate herself long; she hated Kellock. It took Medora till five o'clock in the morning to cool down. An incident contributed to return of calm, because, after she had left him, the man turned on his electric light — she saw it under the door. And apparently he kept it on. She could also hear him walking about. It was clear therefore that she had disturbed him a good deal.

"I wonder he didn't turn over and go to sleep again," she reflected bitterly.

It was long before she forgave him.

"Even if he didn't want me, he oughtn't to have said so," reflected Medora. "He ought to have pretended he was glad. To send me away like a naughty school child after all I've done for him!"

She determined that he must be punished and decided that she would not get up at all next day, but stop in her room and pretend to be ill. And in a thousand other ways she would punish him also. He should see that she could be as frosty as he. Indeed he had frozen her effectually now. And she told herself that it would be a very long time before she thawed again.

She slept heavily at last, and when she was called, found that her will to hit back had weakened. By daylight she perceived that nothing was to be gained in quarrelling with Jordan. He had said that he would explain in the morning and she felt it would be better to hear him. She smouldered still and resented her experience extremely; but she was ready when he knocked at her door and they went down to breakfast together.

CHAPTER XIII

IN LONDON

JORDAN KELLOCK made no allusion whatever to Medora's nocturnal aberration as they ate together, but directed her as to his taste in tea and was very anxious to know her own likes and dislikes in matters of food.

"I'll write final copies of my letters," he said, "then we'll go out and get the ring."

Could it be possible, she wondered, that a ring made any difference to his mind? It seemed too childish; yet even the cleverest men retained a streak of the boy. It was from the eternal boy, as exemplified in Ned, that she had escaped. Was Kellock going to be boyish also? He had never shown any sign of it.

She need not have feared.

He did not ask Medora to read the letters to Mr. Trenchard and Ned Dingle; but he had finished them and posted them by ten o'clock and then they set out.

He knew London and took Medora to the British Museum first. She had waited for him to speak about the previous night, while he, apparently, expected her to do so. She had changed her views as to his punishment and believed that she had quite forgiven him. But this was not the case and before the end of the day he found it out.

At the Museum he surprised her by the extent of his knowledge. She had heard enough by the time they went to lunch and better liked the Park, where they sat for a while in the afternoon. Medora saw wealth and beauty and power pass by while Kellock commented.

"That's the sort of thing we're out to alter," he said. But she was not feeling in a socialistic mood.

"Why?" she asked. "Why shouldn't there be beautiful horses and beautiful clothes in the world?"

"It isn't the horses and clothes. It's where they come from, Medora. The horses are bred for money, and the clothes are spun and made for money. But who makes the money? Do the people that ride the horses and wear the clothes make it? No — you and I make it. The workers make it. You and I have just as much right to ride in a carriage as the Queen of England.

"The wealth of the world is exploited," he explained, "and the result is poverty and superfluity. The world could get on perfectly well without those horses and those clothes — yes, and those people; but it couldn't get on without us. We're carrying on the work of civilisation, not those dolls and puppets toying together. Poverty and wealth are the result of the same vicious factor in our social system. They are interdependent and spring from the same rotten roots. Banish poverty and you do away with hunger and ignorance and misery and immorality and other ills, all of which spring from it. And there's only one way to banish poverty, and that's to banish wealth. Then you get a self-respecting order of humanity instead of the present arrangement. If the nation's rich, the people are rich. It all comes back to brain power, and the moment labour is strong enough in brain power, the rest follows. The Trade Unions are only a first little instalment. In fact they're almost past their work now. We've gone beyond them. Syndicalism says good-bye to the poor and good-bye to the rich. Then we shall get face to face with reality."

"And what becomes of all these handsome, dashing, prosperous people then?" she asked.

"Nothing worse than what becomes of us. They will be left with a great deal more than they deserve, because they've never lifted their fingers to help the real good of the world. The revolution in this country, when it comes, will be bloodless — merely a readjustment in conformity with reason and justice. We're out against the system,

not against the individual which battens on it. When we make war on rats and sparrows and wood pigeons, we're not quarrelling with the individual rat or sparrow, but against the class. They've got to go, because they're unsocial and harm the community and take for themselves what was grown and garnered for their betters. And that's what the classes are doing. They take for themselves what was earned by their betters."

"Why are we their betters?"

"Because we justify our existence and they do not. Our lives are a round of work; their lives are a round of luxury and pleasure. We earn the money and they spend it. We save and they waste. Do they spend it on the community? No. They spend it on themselves."

"They're taxed and all that."

"So are we. And taxing is a wrong system anyway. All sources of wealth ought to pour straight into the State and return to everybody in the shape of dignified conditions of life. Money is the source of all evil to people and it ought not to be handled by people, but by the State. If you once knock the idea of money out of the human mind and teach it to think in different values and occupy itself, not with mean necessities and still meaner luxuries and possessions, but the things of the soul — then you get on a higher plane at once."

But she was more interested in things as they were. A man or two obviously admired her, and the fact that she sat beside Kellock did not seem to prevent their open admiration. This cheered her and put her into good spirits.

"How cheeky the gentlemen are," she said. "They don't seem to have any manners at all. They look at you that bold, as if they'd known you all their lives."

"Because they're rich and know that money is power. These silk-hatted brutes have got nothing better to do than to make eyes at every pretty woman they pass. Many of them have never done a stroke of honest work in

their lives, and never intend to. They are lower than the tom cats and yet — that's the amazing thing — satisfied with themselves — pleased with themselves — and treated as decent members of society by the trash like them. I'd have them breaking stones if I could, instead of insulting women with their goggling eyes."

"I dare say some of them are dukes and earls, if we only knew it," said Medora.

"Very likely indeed," he admitted; "they're pretty much what you'd expect dukes and earls to be."

But even Medora felt this was crude.

"There's plenty of good men among the Upper Ten," she assured him. "You think if a chap isn't born in the gutter, he can't be any good."

This was the first of a succession of little snubs; though Jordan hardly felt them at the time. But looking back afterwards, he realised that Medora had her opinions and that, apparently, they did not always echo his own.

He invited her to end the day where she pleased, and she chose a music hall.

Here he was obviously and painfully ill at ease; and he was also surprised to see the extent of Medora's enjoyment. He felt absolute astonishment to hear her laugh so heartily at comic songs on the old familiar lines, and still more amazed that sentimental ditties of the most puling description should have power to move her. She, for her part, could not fail to see that the entertainment cast him down. Not an item of the programme appealed to him and the smoke made him cough.

As they came out, he hoped she had enjoyed it.

"How could I with you so glum?" she asked.

"I wasn't glum. That sort of thing rather misses me — that's all. I've not got the bent of mind for it."

"You're so clever, you never see anything to make you wonder, and so wise, you never see anything to make you laugh," she said.

His eyes grew rather round, but Medora was smiling and had not meant the speech to be acerb.

"I see plenty to make me wonder in London. Who doesn't? And I like a good joke; but these stage people didn't seem funny to me. And honestly, the longer I live, the less I see to laugh at in the world, for a thinking man with high resolves to better things. People laugh for two reasons, I believe: to throw their neighbours off the scent of the truth; or else because they are rattle-pated, light-minded fools, with no more in them than an empty pot. The 'empties' make the most noise, don't they? All the same, I like to hear you laugh, because you laugh honest and it means you're happy. And God knows if there's one thing I want to make happy before everybody on earth, it's you, Medora."

She relented before this speech and took his arm. He was gallant and very jealous for her. He was also very tender and gentle. She acknowledged his consideration as they sat at supper; but he spoiled all by explaining the very special reason for his care and attention.

"The position is a most delicate one," he said, "and naturally I must do nothing to make it more so. You're at the mercy of the world now, in a manner of speaking, Medora — a defenceless creature — not maid, wife or widow, as they say. And so it's up to me to be extra awake and very quick to champion you in every way I can think."

Medora felt that if this were indeed the case, Jordan and not she might be said to stand in the limelight. She, in fact, must remain as much in the shade as possible. But he proceeded and explained his future course of action. It surprised her exceedingly.

"Talking of that and all I owe you for coming to me, you may be sure I shall pay the debt in a proper manner, Medora. I honour you far too much to treat you with anything but the greatest respect and delicacy, I hope; and I certainly would demean myself, or you, to live with

you as a husband till we're married. But let the world think as it pleases — which is mostly evil — we shall know what we really are, and we'll always be — a self-respecting, high-minded pair. It's easy enough to be better than the world thinks you, because it judges others by itself and the mass of people have a very base standard. The law itself is disgusting and bestial in this matter. It sticks to the old, shameful conditions and demands adultery before divorce. So there must be evidence of that — we're ordered to sink to furnishing evidence of it; but we're made of much too fine stuff to sink to the heathen reality. We're a cut above the dirty law — you and me. We want to live our future lives on a plane of mutual respect and admiration. We don't mean all the future to be spoiled by the memory of human weakness."

He made no other allusion to the previous night and Medora's wonderful eyes bent upon him with apparent adoration, while her wonderful heart grew a little hard. She remembered that she had been married and he never had.

"You're a saint," she said.

"Oh, no — only a clean-minded, honourable man, Medora."

She fell asleep gently hating him that night; but after many hours of dreamless slumber, she awoke in better spirits and found herself loving Kellock again. He was a hero and somewhat abnormal, as heroes must be; but, after all, she was a heroine, and should therefore find no supreme difficulty in rising to the heights on which he moved. She saw indeed that this would be necessary if she wished to be happy.

She met him radiantly next morning and he found her mood easy and humble. He knew a man at Doulton's Pottery, and when he suggested going to see the famous works, she agreed.

"We shall be among our own sort there," he said. "It will be good for us. I don't think sitting in Hyde Park

watching the rich was good for us. I may have said a bit more than I meant about them. They're not all worthless wasters, of course, and it's quite true what you said, that there may be a bit of class prejudice in me."

"No, there isn't — not a scrap," she answered. "And if there is, they deserve it. Nobody looks all round things like you do. You'll live to see it all altered no doubt, and do your bit to help alter it."

"If I had my way, them that don't work shouldn't eat," he declared. "Work's the saving of mankind, and you can't be healthy-minded if you sit and look on at life, any more than you can be healthy-bodied if you take no exercise. We all owe a lot to every one else, and them that won't pay that debt and want to take all and give nought, are wicked enemies to the State."

At Doulton's Medora was genuinely interested, and best she liked the painting rooms.

"That's beautiful work," she said. "If I'd been brought up to that, I'd have joyed in it, because there's something to show for it, and you'd know the flowers and ribbons you painted was brightening up other people's homes. But my work — just shifting paper and putting the zinc between the sheets for the glazing rollers — there's nothing to it."

"Don't you say that. All necessary work is fine if it's done well, same as you did it. But there'll be no more of that sort of work for you. Your place will be at home; and I shouldn't be content for you just to do housewife's work neither, Medora. You're going to be my right hand and look after my papers and help me with the big things I hope to do — not in the Mill, but out of it."

"I never shall be clever enough."

"Yes, you will. You'll come to it when you get a grasp of all the questions we're out to solve. You'll begin at the beginning, where I did, and master the theory of socialism — the theories I should say, because it's a science that's in the making and clever men are still working out

the details. There's a lot of difference of opinion, and so far as I can see, our leaders — the 'intellectuals,' as they are called — don't see eye to eye by any means yet. They're all for universal democracy, of course, and the government of the people by the people and the redistribution of wealth and the uplift of the worker and so on; but they differ as to how it's to be done and how the mass is to be brought out of slavery to the promised land. In fact no two of 'em think the same, strange to say."

"It's a big subject," said Medora blankly.

"It's the only subject."

"I lay you've thought it all out."

"I've got my ideas, and in our evenings I shall put 'em before you and read you a lot I've written about it. We'll go over it together, and you'll bring your own wits to work on it when you've mastered all the different opinions."

"I wish I was half as clever as you think," she said.

"You don't know what you can do till you try. The first thing is to get interested in it and let it soak into you. Once you feel like I do, that it is the only thing that really matters for the race, then you'll properly live for it."

"I expect I shall," replied Medora, with a fainting soul.

"There's noble women giving up their lives to it, and I hope you'll be one of them some day."

She began to experience the discomfort of the mountain climber, who ascends into more rarefied air than he is accustomed to breathe. It was not until she had enjoyed a good lunch and a bottle of lemonade that Medora felt lighter-hearted.

They went to no more music halls, but Jordan took her to a play of Shakespeare and a concert. They also visited the Mint, the Tower of London and the Zoological Gardens. At the last she was interested and happy. He improved every occasion. On one afternoon they went to a meeting of the Labour Party and heard great lights discuss the Internationale. Kellock flamed with enthusiasm

afterwards and talked ceaselessly till bed time. She had never seen him so excited. She retired with a headache, bewildered and bored to tears.

Of personal matters the only interest centred in a communication from Mr. Trenchard. As for Dingle, he did not answer Jordan's letter. Nor did he come to see Jordan, as Medora half hoped he might. She trusted that some emotional scenes were to occur in the future; but if drama lay in store for her, it would doubtless be at Dene, not in London.

She wrote to her mother justifying her conduct; but Lydia did not reply.

"I've lost mother," said Medora, after three days' silence. "She's not going to answer that nice letter I showed you. In fact I've lost everybody but you. And I'd lose them all a hundred times over for you, Jordan."

"We must be patient," he said. "We know we're right, and those that know they're right can afford to be patient. The rest will be brought to see it in process of time. They must be educated to the truth. Everything depends on education, Medora. It works through everything—in private affairs and public affairs alike. Ignorance makes all the trouble in the world; and once the spread of education brings the light, then we get a move on and see our way clear. It is for you and me to show the people that we are sure of ourselves and set them the example of how to behave."

"We'll live it down," said Medora.

"No; we've got nothing to live down," he declared. "It's for them to live down their ignorance of the case. And it is for us to help them to do it and show them, day by day, that we were right and they were wrong. But you can't do big things without suffering big things. I warn you there will be a lot at first who will side against us—the sort that judge by the outside, as most do."

"I dare say we'll be sent to Coventry."

"They may cabal against us like that. But the harder

the opposition, the greater the triumph when we show them what we are. We must look to each other for our comfort and support and to our own hearts and good conscience. I'm not afraid for myself. A man can weather anything if he knows he is right. But for a tender creature like you, all full of nerves and that, it will be harder. But you may trust me to be pretty wide awake on your behalf, Medora. I'll be sleepless to shield you and come between you and every hard word. I'll fight for you, I promise you."

"I know that," she said. "The pinch will be before we're married. Afterwards they'll soon calm down."

Her affection and trust were unbounded. She believed that he would fight for her, and she looked forward not a little to seeing him do so.

Through the atmosphere of the Metropolis, the people at Dene shrank a little. She was prepared to return with a mind enlarged and a perspective widened. No doubt she and Jordan would come to London themselves some day, when he took his place among the leaders. But in the meantime she would not for anything have missed the return to her native village. Her new clothes alone must have sufficed to dictate this step. He, too, at her wish, had bought some new clothes, and though he hesitated at her choice, which led to rather more radiant colours than Kellock was wont to wear, yet he told himself, very truly, that in such a matter no principle was involved. He also felt that it became him to fall in with his future wife's wishes when and where it was possible and reasonable to do so.

They visited the Arts and Crafts Exhibition, where the new Dene water-mark pictures created daily admiration, completed their holiday and so returned; and their homecoming was anticipated in various ways, showing, though ignorance is the root of all evil, as Jordan never wearied of declaring, that even ignorant hearts may soar to heights of distinguished humanism.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DRYING LOFTS

A DOZEN great piles of "water leaf" had come up from the vat room to the hand presses, and here the paper, from which tons of crystal water had already been expressed below, under new and tremendous pressure yielded still more. Indeed, with half a dozen men bearing on the levers of the presses, the "water leaf," that had appeared so dry, beaded and glittered and then exuded further rivulets of moisture. For the last turn of the screw a great beam was thrust into the press and as many men as could get purchase upon it lent their united strength. Ernest Trood, passing through the pressing room, gave a hand, and a stack of newly made paper was subjected to such strain that one had thought it must disintegrate beneath it.

Here, under this tremendous impost, the grain mark, or pattern imparted to each sheet by the felts at the first pressing in the vat room, was removed.

For the drying lofts the paper was next destined and hither Ernest Trood now found himself summoned by a messenger. Mr. Trenchard desired to speak with him.

The drying lofts were enormous airy chambers that ascended to an unceiled roof. Through the twilight gloom of these apartments, the sheets of paper, large and small, glimmered, hanging aloft in multi-coloured reams like fairy washing; pink and blue, yellow and snow-white. The paper seemed to make dim rainbows aloft, where it ascended tier on tier in many thousands of separate pieces. Every sheet was suspended over ropes, strung across transverse beams on light scaffolding, that filled the lofts and ascended into the dark dome of the roof. Above them

spun drying fans, to expel the exhausted air and suck away the moisture exuding from the masses of paper; while on the floors beneath there wound and twisted an elaborate system of hot-air pipes, which raised the temperature at will.

Drying is a process that demands watchfulness and judgment, for wet paper suspended here on the tackle does not respond in all its parts simultaneously. From the deckle edge it dries inward and the last spot to dry is the centre of each sheet. The dry workers, with a hand-tool like a T square, hang their sheets over the russet, cow-hair ropes; then when the rope is loaded, pull it aloft; but the art of drying lies in the regulation of heat and air. The heat is great, yet regular; every operation is ordered for cleanliness and purity, so that not a speck of dust may fall to mar a sheet.

Here came Matthew Trenchard upon a question of temperature. The talk concerned technical details of ventilation and did not take long, since Trood and his master seldom differed. But there was a more doubtful human problem upon which Trenchard desired to learn Trood's opinion.

"I've heard from Kellock," he said, "and before I answer him, I want to hear you speak — also Pinhey."

"It's not likely that Nicholas Pinhey and me would say the same," answered Ernest. "We differ where we can on most subjects, and shall on this, I reckon."

"He won't influence me — more will you," answered Trenchard. "You and I will probably think alike, as we're used to do. What I want from Nicholas has to do with Mrs. Dingle, who works in the glazing house — or did. Let's go into the flat room and I'll send for him."

The flat room was another chamber for paper drying. Hither came the great sheets of "double elephant" and "imperial" — precious and wonderful papers for the artist and draughtsman, that could not be hung over a rope or creased. They rested upon beds of webbing, which

were lifted one above the other and offered free access to the warm air that plied through them. Here dried noble sheets of a quality that rejoiced the painter who touched their surface, and felt their solid texture.

Nicholas Pinhey, spotless and trim, with shining spectacles and a white apron, appeared and Mr. Trenchard briefly stated the situation. He was carrying a "cross," the little tool used to hang the paper on the lines, and he tapped his points against the wall of the flat room as he uttered them.

"It seems Kellock, who is on holiday, has run away with Mrs. Dingle. I've just heard from him stating the facts as far as they may be supposed to concern me. He doesn't seem to think it is anybody's business but his own."

"A man may be ill and not know it," said Mr. Pinhey, "and he may be suffering from the sickness of sin and not know it. But we know it."

"I'm not a sin-doctor — I'm a paper maker, Nicholas. And the sole question for me is whether Kellock comes back, or does not. He writes very decently, says he is prepared to justify his conduct if I feel it is any concern of mine, and adds that he will be well pleased to return if I want him."

"Don't let him slip, for the Lord's sake," begged Ernest Trood. "You'll wait a month of Sundays before you'll get another vatman in the same street as him. Vatmen will be as rare as curates very soon. He's a most orderly chap and a rare worker, which the clever ones often are not, and a great believer in discipline. You may be sure, according to his lights, that he's done the best for all parties in this matter of Medora Dingle."

"How can you, Trood?" asked Mr. Pinhey indignantly. "And you call yourself a Christian man, for I've heard you do it."

"The mistake you make, Nicholas, is to drag religion into a lot of things where it don't belong," answered Trood.

"There's nothing where religion don't belong," declared

the finisher, "and if that was understood and religion applied to every problem of living and working and dying, this world would be different from what it is."

"The question is, of course, Ned Dingle," explained Trenchard. "I don't want to back up one man against the other or interfere in any way over their domestic affairs. I'm not here to probe and pry, but to make paper along with the rest of you. Both Ned and Jordan are very good fellows; but it's quite clear they won't see alike in this matter."

"Don't be too sure," advised Mr. Trood. "Least said soonest mended, and for all anybody can swear to the contrary it may be a put-up thing. Of course Ned would have to pretend a lot of temper in that case — to blind the public eye; because if it got out that Kellock had agreed to take over his wife for the better happiness and understanding of all parties, the Law would step in very quick and queer their pitch. If these things were settled by common sense, the Law would lose money — the last thing it ever loses. But it may be like that — Kellock being such a shrewd and long-sighted man. So I should just keep Jordan and let Dingle say what he's going to do. Ned's not showing more feeling, so far, than the case demands. He may be thanking God in secret and be quite as religious-minded as Nicholas could wish."

"It's generally known of course," said Trenchard.

"Such things can't be hid and didn't ought to be," replied Mr. Pinhey. "We're a very high-toned lot here for the most part, and me and Trood have something to do with that I believe; and I should be very sorry if he was to pander to evil."

"Nobody's pandering to evil, Nicholas," explained Matthew Trenchard. "But business is business and will continue to be so. I don't lose Kellock if I can help it; but Dingle's a very good man, too, and I wish to consider him."

"Dingle's nothing to Kellock," asserted Trood; "and

I shouldn't for an instant say Kellock was all wrong and Dingle all right. Women don't run away from their husbands for nothing. I believe Ned's been knocking her about, and she was divided between them in the past, and now, finding she backed the wrong one, she's gone over to the other. It seems to be a private affair in my opinion."

"Sin's never a private affair. It's everybody's affair and ought to be everybody's enemy," said Pinhey.

"Then let nature take its course," suggested Ernest Trood. "Let Dingle divorce her in a respectable way, and let us spare their feelings all we can."

"Obviously they can't both stop here after this," observed Trenchard, "and if Kellock comes back, Dingle will go."

"You'll be putting a premium on vice if you agree to that, Mr. Trenchard."

"There's no vice in it, Nicholas," answered Trood. "It's like an old woman to talk that way. You know very well indeed that Jordan Kellock's not a vicious person."

"I know very well he is, then. And them as don't go to church, or chapel, like him, have nothing to stand between them and temptation. And this is the result."

Trenchard laughed at Pinhey.

"That's where the shoe pinches — eh, Nicholas? But we mustn't be narrow-minded because we live in a narrow valley. That's what I tell others besides you. Kellock is a man of high feelings and great ideals. I don't agree with much that he dreams; but I know this: that the dreamer who makes his dreams come true is the salt of the earth. He's very young and he's got a mighty lot to learn — and he'll learn it. Whether he has the brains to go far I can't say, but at present he's very valuable to me and as he's willing to come back, I take him back. As for Ned, I shall see him to-day and hear all that he cares to tell me. I'm heartily sorry for his troubles; but he's a sane sort of chap, too, and no doubt has come to some conclusion about the future."

"That only leaves the woman then," said Trood.

"She'll go in any case," declared the master.

"I won't answer for the glazing room if she don't," promised Mr. Pinhey. "In a manner of speaking, after five-and-twenty years there, I may be said to set the tone of the glazing room, Mr. Trenchard, and if she were to come into it again and take her place at the crib, the other women, if I know 'em, would rise up and depart."

"Not them, Nicholas. You don't know women if you think that. Women don't cut off their noses to spite their faces in my experience."

"You can't touch pitch and not be defiled, Ernest."

"Who wants to touch pitch? The girl ain't pitch; and if she were, she's not the sort to influence anybody. Just a silly, everyday, selfish creature, vain of her good looks and with no more sense than, please God, she should have. The mystery is that Lydia Trivett, who's made of sense, should have put none into her child."

"She'll go as a matter of course," repeated Matthew Trenchard. "Her own feeling would decide that question. I hate interfering with anybody here, Pinhey, and because a great many of you pay me the compliment to consult me about your private affairs, that's no reason why I should ever go into them on my own account."

"But when those that work under you do wrong, then, as their employer and leader, I submit in all civility it's up to you to learn them right," argued Nicholas. "It's putting a bonus on sin if Kellock stops here."

Trood snorted and called Pinhey a fool; but Trenchard spoke gently to him.

"I admire your clean and resolute religious views of life, if I don't always share them," he answered; "but we mustn't be self-righteous, Nick, and we mustn't think our own standard of conduct covers all the ground. You wait till we know more about it. Sin's like conscience, a matter of education, Nicholas, and what's sin in one man is no sin at all in another. We mustn't fling the first

stone too readily, because few of us have got the judicial mind, or the impartial and unprejudiced outlook, or the knowledge of the facts that belong, or ought to belong, to the judgment seat."

"We can all read the Scriptures," answered Mr. Pinhey firmly, "and if our judgment is founded on the Word, Mr. Trenchard, it is founded on the Rock of Ages, with Whom is no shadow of turning. And I don't say I'll stop under the same roof as an adulterer, I don't indeed."

"You'll do your duty, Nicholas; I'm sure of that," answered the other, and Pinhey, sighing profoundly, went his way.

"There's no fool like a pious fool," said Trood scornfully, "and I hope to Heaven you'll let Kellock stop. Beatermen, like Dingle, are got again, but such vatmen as Jordan Kellock are not."

"I know that mighty well, Ernest, and just for that reason we must look sharp into it and not let self-interest bend us into anything wrong. With some men I'd fire them on a job like this and have no more words about it; but Kellock's different. He's honourable, so far as my experience goes, and scrupulous in small things — a straight man every way. He has himself well in hand and he's got ambitions. He would hardly have done such a grave thing as this on foolish impulse. But I don't want to be prejudiced for him any more than against him. I'll leave it till I've heard Ned."

"And don't you let Dingle turn you from him," begged Ernest. "It stands to reason that Dingle won't have much good to say of him. Whatever he feels in secret, he must curse Kellock openly. In my opinion you ought to hear Kellock also on his own defence, before you sack him."

"Perhaps I ought; and perhaps I will," answered the other. "I shan't lose Kellock if it's in right and reason to keep him. Send Ned to me after dinner at one o'clock."

CHAPTER XV

GOING UP CORKSCREW HILL

BELOW Bow Bridge a row of narrow-headed stepping-stones are regularly placed across the river with their noses pointing up stream. The current sets thin lines of light trickling away, where the stones break its surface. Above the crossing, trees overhang the water and throw shadows to break the white sheen of stickles and the flash of foam; beneath the stepping-stones the channel widens and flows forward to the estuary. A dead tree had fallen here and upon one bough, overhanging a still pool, sat a kingfisher, like a spark of blue fire against the grey and umber colours spread round him. Beyond, where the stream bent eastward, there rose a fir-clad hill, and at water's brink stood cottages with irregular thatched roofs. Their white-washed faces represented the highest light of the scene and were a centre and focus for that rural picture.

Beside the stepping-stones Ned Dingle sat and smoked his pipe. The water at his feet had run fine after a spell of dry weather, and there was only the motion of the lazy stream, broken now and then by a small fish. White ducks paddled close by in a shallow, where the afternoon sunshine turned the water to liquid amber and made the birds golden bright.

Ned thought of an autumn day, when he had landed not far off with Kellock and Medora at the boathouse; and he retraced all the months between. He was in melancholy mood and as yet had not determined on his future actions; but he had seen Matthew Trenchard, given notice and left the Mill.

The master was sympathetic and friendly. He accepted the situation and on this Saturday, as Dingle awaited others at the stepping-stones, the beaterman reflected that his activities at Dene were ended. He was now about to seek work elsewhere. On Monday, Kellock would return, and Mrs. Trivett reported that Jordan had already taken rooms for the present at "The Waterman's Arms," a little inn standing up the valley between Dene and Ashprington, at Bow Bridge.

Dingle still failed to grasp the extent of the disaster that had overtaken him. His moods alternated between wrath and grief and bewilderment at his loss. Mrs. Trivett supported him frankly and she introduced an element of mystery into the scandal, for she continued to declare it was not in Kellock's character to do this thing. Even the fact that he had done it was powerless to alter her reiterated assertion. She never greatly blamed Kellock, even when others pointed out that men do not run away with other men's wives on compulsion; and one fact she never ceased to dwell upon, which comforted Dingle in a negative sort of fashion.

She repeated her assurance this evening; for now there came to Dingle, Lydia and the girl, Daisy Finch, Medora's friend. They were at leisure, since the day was Saturday, and they had joined him by appointment to fulfil a certain task. Mrs. Trivett, unaware of Medora's sentiments on the subject, had suggested that her daughter's things should be moved from Ned's house and taken to "The Waterman's Arms," there to await her, and Ned agreed. His purpose was to leave no trace of Medora in his house; and soon there would be no trace of him either, for he was about to seek work elsewhere and doubted not to find it.

As they ascended the hill to Ashprington, Lydia repeated her assurance. She had good private reasons for uttering more ferocious sentiments than perhaps she felt.

"It can't be that he'll ever make her happy," she said. "It's out of that man's power to do it. And not only I

say so, for Philander Knox, who is very understanding, said so, last week without any promptings from me. He said so from his knowledge of Kellock, while I say so from my knowledge of my child. And so I tell you, Ned, as I've told you before, that you'll be very properly revenged, without lifting your hand to anybody."

"I shall do what I shall do," he answered, "and I don't know more than you what I shall do. I may take forty shillings or a month out of the man yet. Some days I feel like that; other days I do not. For all she's done I know this: I understand your blasted daughter better than ever Kellock will."

"Mr. Knox says they'll both get their punishment and he hopes you'll let 'em be. And if you did, that would be the worst punishment. In Philander's opinion there's no call for anybody to interfere, because let 'em alone and they'll punish each other to their dying day. That's the terrible picture he paints of it."

"I'll never understand," he answered. "I'll never know what choked her off me. There must have been secret enemies at work lying against me I reckon. But she could never put a case against me worth its weight in words, and to the last I didn't dream what she was up to. A base, treacherous bit of play-acting I call it. And to crown all by that beastly letter."

"If you could believe in such things, I'd say Medora had the evil eye put upon her and was ill-wished into this," said Daisy. "Such a girl as she was — so happy, and so fond of an outing, and so fond of cheerful company; and used to be so fond of Ned, I'm sure, for when you was first married, she was always telling me how she cared for you. Then the change came over her like bad weather. What did Jordan Kellock say, Ned, if I may ask?"

"There's no secrets. The letter's like the man — cut and dried. Nobody else on God's earth could have written it I should think. He feels that Medora made a mistake, but that it needn't be fatal to all three of us; and that,

as we all respect ourselves, and are responsible members of society, we can put the mistake right in a reasonable and dignified sort of way. Never a word of shame. He seems to think he's only got to state the facts, as he sees them, for me to fall in with them. He says, of course, my first thought will be consideration for Medora, so that her sensitive and delicate nature may be spared as much as possible. He feels quite sure that he can leave the subject in my hands, and assures me that he will do everything possible to assist me. That's the divorce of course. Medora wasn't so nice in her letter. She ordered me to divorce her sharp. But even so, I'd sooner have her insults than his civility. Civility by God! From him. She'd worked herself up to a pitch of temper when she wrote that trash, and let out the poison he's put into her mind. She's a damned silly woman and that's all there is to her; but faithless, worthless wretch that she is, I can forgive her easier than him. I don't feel as if I wanted to shoot her, or cut her throat, or anything like that. My feeling to her is beyond my power to put into words at present, though no doubt it will clear itself. But I see him clear enough for a foul hypocrite — smug and sly and heartless. He's played for his own hand for a year and slowly worked her up to the outrage she's put on me. In fact I don't see how I can very well help breaking his neck, when it comes to the point."

"It ain't for me to stand up for him against you," admitted Lydia. "All the same, my instinct tells me to pray you not to be rough, Ned. You've got right on your side, and it's easier in some ways to suffer wrong than commit it."

"Depends what you call wrong," he answered. "If Kellock thought it no wrong to kindiddle my wife away from me, why should I think it wrong to get back a bit of my own? Men have killed men for less than this, and a jury of husbands have said they wasn't guilty. I may not be the sort to kill anybody; but I'll let him that bleats

such a lot about self-respect see I've got my self-respect as well as he has, and mean to act according. It's all in the air — I don't know what I shall do. I've got to make him eat his self-respect somehow and show him what he is; and that's a long way different from what he thinks he is. I'll make 'em look a pair of fools sooner or later — if no worse."

"So you will then; and take it in a high spirit and do nought to make yourself look a fool," urged Lydia; but he declared that it was too late for that.

"I look a fool all right," he said. "I'm not such a sand-blind sort of man that I don't know very well what I look like. People always laugh at a chap in my fix. Let 'em. Perhaps I shall laugh too presently. The difference between me and that man is that I can stand a bit of laughter; but he couldn't. Laughter would kill him. He'd stand up to blame and hard words and curses. He likes 'em — he told me so — because it shows his ideas go deep and fret people's accepted opinions. Every reformer must make enemies, or he's not doing his job right — so he said to Knox one day, and I heard him. But laughter and scorn and contempt — that's different."

They reached Ned's house and, for his sake, set about their painful task with resolution.

"It's like as if we was going through a dead woman's things," whispered Daisy to Mrs. Trivett and the elder agreed.

"She is dead as far as poor Ned's concerned," she answered. "And if anything on earth could shame her to death, surely it will be to see all her clothes and everything she's got in the world waiting for her when she arrives."

Daisy, however, argued for her friend while they collected her garments and tied them in brown paper parcels.

"I don't want to say a word against Mr. Dingle, but all the same no such dreadful thing could have happened if he'd been the right one. There's always two sides to

every trouble and there must be excuses that we don't know about."

Mrs. Trivett admitted this.

"There's always excuses for everybody that we don't know about, Daisy. We all do things we can't explain — good as well as bad; and if we can't explain ourselves to ourselves, then it's right and reasonable as we shouldn't be too sure we can explain other people."

They made parcels of everything that belonged to Medora, then Ned brought to them a work-box, two pictures in frames and a sewing-machine.

"These have all got to go also," he said. "And this lot you'd better give her when you see her. It's her trinkums and brooches and such like."

He gave Mrs. Trivett a little box which she put in her pocket without speaking.

Another woman joined them. She was Ned's old aunt, who had come to him to keep his house as long as he should remain in it. She talked venomously of Medora.

Presently they carried the parcels down the lane to the foot of the hill and left them at "The Waterman's Arms," in a little parlour on one side of the entrance. Then Ned went home and Daisy Finch and Mrs. Trivett returned to Dene. There the girl left Lydia, and the latter, after a cup of tea with a neighbour, prepared to climb the Corkscrew Hill and return to Cornworthy.

Then it was that she found a man waiting for her and Philander Knox appeared.

"I knew your movements," he said, "and I knew that you'd be setting out for the farm just about now, so I thought as I'd keep you company up the hill. For I always find, going up the Corkscrew, that it's easier travelled in company."

She was gratified.

"You're a kind soul and I'm very glad, if you've got nothing better to do. My thoughts ain't pleasant companions to-night, Mr. Knox."

"They should be," he answered, "for your thoughts can't bully you, nor yet accuse you of things left undone, or done ill, like most of us have got to suffer from them. You can face your thoughts same as you can face your deeds, with a good conscience all the time."

"Who can? I can't. I'm cruel vexed now. That slip of a child, Daisy Finch, have been showing me that I may have been too hard on my own daughter. And yet — how can one feel too hard? 'Tisn't as if I didn't know Ned Dingle. But I do. He's took this in a very Christian spirit — so far. I'd never have thought for a moment he'd have held in so well, or been such a gentleman over it. Some people might almost think he didn't care and didn't feel it; but he does — with all his heart he does. He couldn't speak when I left him just now."

"That's true — he certainly does feel it properly. But it's a very peculiar case, along of Kellock being the man he is. I haven't got to the bottom of the thing yet. As a rule I'm not great on other people's business, as you know, but in this case, along of my hopes where you're concerned, Lydia, I take this to be a part of my business; and I'm going to get to the bottom of it by strategy and find out what made him take her away from Ned."

"It don't much matter now. The past is past and it won't help us to know more than we know."

"You can't say that. You can read the future in the past if you've got understanding eyes. And I haven't hid from you I'm far from hopeful about the future, because I can't see them two suiting each other through a lifetime. They won't."

"So you said."

They stood to rest at a bend in the tremendous hill. Mr. Knox dabbed his brow with a red cotton handkerchief.

"This blessed mountain brings the beads to the forehead every time I come up to it," he declared. "You're a wonder; you hop up like a bird."

"I'm Devonshire — born to hills."

"You can't have valleys without 'em."

"That's true. We've all got to take the rough with the smooth, and the steep with the level."

"To take the rough smoothly is the whole art of living," declared Philander, "and I thought I was pretty clever at it till I met you. But you can give us all a start and a beating. Well, this may or may not be a likely moment to come back to the all important question; but impulse guides right as often as wrong, and if I'm wrong there's no harm done I hope. Have you had time to turn it over, or have you been too busy?"

"I owed it to you to turn it over," she answered after a short pause. "You've got as much right to go on with your life as I have to go on with mine. Time don't stand still because men and women are in two minds."

"If you're in two minds —"

"I don't say that; yet I don't deny it. I have thought about you. You're a good chap and very restful to the nerves; and your sense, coming on the foolishness of some people, shows up in a bright light."

"You've hardly seen a twinkle of it yet, Lydia. I don't want to blow my own trumpet, or nothing like that; but with all my faults, you'd find the sense was here, and the patience."

"You're a marrying sort of man, no doubt, and you've got all the makings of a good, restful husband — I see that too. But I reckon you haven't looked round far enough yet. There's a lot against me. I ain't a free woman by any manner of means, and you don't want to be saddled with my troubles. That's the worse of marriage in my opinion. A man says, 'I take the woman and not her family,' and the woman says the same; but things don't fall out like that in life. There's always the families, and nobody can escape from 'em."

"True, but we can be very good friends with our relations without doing nursemaid's work for 'em as well as

our own work. 'Tis time you stopped working altogether in my opinion, and had a bit of rest and comfort to your life — such a dignified creature as you are by nature. The farm gets stuffier and stuffier and you can't deny it. It will tell on your health and break you down. So why not do as I beg of you and come to me?"

"Have you ever thought of that nice woman, Alice Barefoot?" asked Lydia suddenly, and Mr. Knox stopped dead, stared at her through the gloaming and mopped his head and neck again.

"Good God! What d'you mean?"

"A woman without a care or encumbrance and —"

"Stop," he said. "That's not a worthy remark, and I'll start to forget and forgive it, if you please, this moment. If you just think all that goes to such a speech as that, you'll be sorry you made it. A man tells you he loves you, and you say 'Try next door.' That's bad enough in itself; but there's more to it and worse even than that. For it means either you don't know Alice, or you don't know me. You ought to understand perfectly well that a woman like her is no more use to me than a Red Indian. And you do know it; and if you'd thought half a minute, you'd never have let yourself say such a wild and unkind and silly thing as that. It shows a very great lack of interest in me — far less interest than I thought you felt in fact. I'm shook, Lydia; I thought we understood each other better."

"She's a fine and a good woman," said Mrs. Trivett feebly.

"Good she may be, in a bleak sort of way; fine she is not and you know it. Besides, surely at my time of life a man wants a mind, if he's got one himself. No doubt you think the world of Alice Barefoot; but even you ain't going to argue she's got more mind than would go on a three-penny piece and leave a margin."

"I'm sorry — I was quite wrong," confessed Lydia.

"You were, and since you're sorry, enough said. I'll

resume another time. Here's the top and I won't go no farther to-night. You ain't yourself, I'm afraid."

"Do please come and have a glass of cider. Tom thinks the world of you, Philander."

"That's better. If you say 'come,' then of course I'll come. But don't let there be any false pretences about it. We've all got to pretend a lot in this world; but I ain't going to pretend nothing about Tom Dolbear. I don't visit at Priory Farm for his company, but for yours; and, if God wills, I'll get you out of it sooner or later, Lydia."

"He don't suspect nothing like that," she said.

"He does not — that's certain, else he wouldn't offer me his cider or anything else. But a time is at hand when he'll have to face it — and his wife also. Most women would have seen through it by now; but she's always asleep, or half asleep, while you do her work."

"Poor Mary," said Mrs. Trivett.

"Her doom is coming near I hope and trust," he answered. "You're not doing right at all in standing between that woman and her duty. You come to me, and then she'll find that she's only got time to sleep eight hours in the twenty-four; and she'll also find the meaning of a family."

They proceeded together and Knox presently smoked a pipe with Tom; but he seemed not as amiable as usual and contradicted the farmer's opinion flatly on more than one occasion.

Mr. Dolbear, however, thought very highly of the vat-man and doubted not that Mr. Knox was right.

"I learn from you," he said.

CHAPTER XVI

AT "THE WATERMAN'S ARMS"

A MEASURE of argument arose between Abel Hayman and his wife, master and mistress of "The Waterman's Arms." He had held that to receive Medora and Kellock was quite impossible, while she took a contrary opinion, and her word was law.

"Morals is morals, and business is business," said Mrs. Hayman, "and I know Jordan Kellock by reputation, and his reputation is all it should be. Dingle will get a bill of divorcement and they'll be married according to law; and if they don't come to us, they'll go to the 'Ring of Bells,' so enough said."

Mr. Hayman relented at sound of "The Ring of Bells," and was ready to welcome the guests when they arrived.

It seemed strange to Medora, who had passed the little inn by the bridge so many times, to enter the door and find it her home for a season. It was a cool and restful spot, and the private rooms, facing the stream, were removed some way from the bar. A yellow rose straggled over the face of the building and in the garden were old world flowers, now pushing up to renewed life — columbines and bleeding hearts, orange lilies and larkspurs.

Medora arrived weary, and Kellock, to his own surprise, proved nervous and found himself wishing very heartily that his first day at work was ended. He knew not what might be in store for him, and Medora, who was not in a happy mood, had, in the train, deplored the fact that they were returning. Nothing would have disappointed her more than not to do so; yet she meant it at the moment when she said it, for who does not often contradict his

own deep-seated desire and side, as it were, against himself at some passing whim from within, or inspiration from without?

When she found all her clothes and possessions waiting for her, Medora fell very silent, and Jordan puzzled to know how they should have come there.

"I told my mother where we were going to stop," she explained, "but, of course, I never said nothing about my clothes. I didn't regard them as mine no more — nor yet the ornaments."

"They meant well. You needn't wear them."

Their supper was laid in a little parlour on one side of the private entrance, and when Medora descended, she found Mrs. Hayman turning up the lamp.

"You'll be tired, my dear, I expect," said the elder, "and Mr. Kellock also. Shall I send in bottled beer or draught?"

"We shan't want nothing in that way. Yes, I will too — I'll have a Bass, Mrs. Hayman; but he won't — he's teetotal. Was it my mother brought my things?"

"She did — her and Daisy Finch. And your mother's coming over to see you to-morrow morning. I was to be sure and tell you."

"I suppose it have made a bit of stir, Mrs. Hayman?"

"What have, my dear?"

"Me, running away with Mr. Kellock."

"Not that I have heard of. There's such a lot of running away now-a-days. Though, as a man said in the bar a few nights ago, there ain't much need for most women to run. They can go their own pace, so long as it takes 'em away from their lawfuls. Take my own niece. She married a wheelwright, and ran away with a carpenter six months after. And when she did, far the happiest of them three people was the wheelwright. Yet the guilty pair, so to call 'em, thought he'd do dreadful things; they didn't draw a breath in comfort till they'd got to Canada, and put the ocean between. Marriage, in fact, ain't what

it was. In my opinion it won't stand the strain much longer. It was never built to endure against such facilities for getting about and seeing new faces as the people have now — let alone the education. These here life-long partnerships — however, no doubt you know all about it. I'm a very broad-minded woman myself, and never throw a stone, though I don't live in a glass house, for me and my husband are two of the lucky ones. I've never wished for no change, and God help him if he'd shown any feeling of that sort."

Medora little liked the assumption that her achievement was an affair of every day.

"Few have got the courage and self-respect to do it," she said.

"Tain't that. It's selfishness in some cases, and just common sense in others. We small people are much freer to act than the upper sort. And as divorce costs a mint of money, there's thousands and thousands fling up all hope of an orderly release, and part, and go their own way, and live respectable lives that make the Church properly yelp and wring its hands. But the Church is powerless against the Law, so my husband says; and the Law takes very good care to keep the whip-hand and make divorce a great source of income for lawyers. However, Dingle is a prosperous man, and no doubt he'll run to it and do the needful. The trouble in these cases is the children, and lucky that don't arise this time. 'Tis a very great thing in my view that a woman should have her children by the man she prefers."

"Who wants children?" asked Medora. "They're nothing but a curse and a nuisance most times. Me and Mr. Kellock want to do important things in the world, Mrs. Hayman."

"If you can think of anything more important than getting a brace of good healthy children, I'd be glad to know what it is," answered the landlady. "I speak without prejudice in that matter, never having had none my-

self. But that's no fault of ours — merely the will of Providence, and nothing more puzzling or outrageous ever happened, for I was one of seven and Abel one of ten; and yet God willed me barren — a good mother blasted in the bud, you might say. I sometimes wish the Almighty would let Nature take its course a bit oftener."

Medora was glad that Kellock arrived at this moment.

"I'm going to have a glass of beer, Jordan," she said. "I'm properly tired to-night, and I shan't sleep if I don't."

He answered nothing, for she had promised to give up stimulant. Then Mrs. Hayman went to fetch their supper.

Medora enjoyed familiar Devon food, ate well, and slept well enough presently in a comfortable feather bed, with the murmur of Bow River for a lullaby.

The next day was Sunday, and Mrs. Trivett duly arrived, to be received in the little parlour. Medora kissed her, and Kellock offered to shake hands; but he found that Lydia was far from cordial. She kissed Medora coldly, and ignored the man.

"I felt it my duty to see you, Medora," she began, "because I don't want for you, nor yet Mr. Kellock, to be under any doubt about my feelings. I think you've done a very evil and ill-convenient thing, and I'd like to know what would become of the world if everybody was to break their oaths and make hay of their marriage lines, same as you have."

Medora quoted from Mrs. Hayman, and Kellock ventured to think that each case ought to be judged on its own merits.

"I quite understand I'm in a very delicate position so far as you're concerned. I don't expect you to take my side in the matter, though I'm quite confident that in a year's time, Mrs. Trivett, you'll see this is a blessing in disguise. And I tell you that Medora's husband that was, abused his rights, so that it was up to me, who loved

and respected Medora, to rescue her from him. Because, if she'd stopped under his cruel tyranny much longer, she'd have lost everything that makes life worth living for man or woman."

"And where did you get this news from? Where did you hear Ned Dingle was a cruel tyrant, and all the rest of it?"

"On the best possible authority surely. I had it from Medora herself."

There was a pause, then Lydia proceeded.

"Yesterday, at Ned's wish — at his wish, mind — me and Daisy Finch went to his house and packed up every stitch belonging to my daughter — every tiniest thing that was hers — and brought 'em here for her comfort. You wouldn't call that a cruel thing, would you?"

"You might have saved yourself the trouble, because Mr. Kellock wouldn't let me wear them even if I wanted to," said Medora. "It shows his nice feeling against my late husband's coarse feeling — as if any proper thinking man could suppose I wanted anything about me to remind me of the bitter past. I've got everything new from London."

"A pity you couldn't have got a new — however, I'm not here to lecture you. I'm your mother. I've only a few things to say."

"How's Mr. Dingle took it?" asked Medora.

"Like a Christian, so far, and will, I hope, to the end."

"Will he see me?" enquired Kellock. "He didn't answer my letter."

"I can't tell as to that. Like the rest of us, he was a lot surprised that you could come back here after a thing like this. And Mr. Knox said your point of view was beyond his experience. He wondered if you expected to see a triumphal arch put up. But Ned feels more like an ordinary, decent person, I reckon. He's going. He's left the Mill, and he's going to put up his house for sale."

"If he's took it like a Christian, as you say, perhaps

he'll go farther still," suggested Kellock. "There's only one house in these parts that's like to suit Medora and myself; but perhaps Dingle's house —?"

His dry mind saw nothing impossible about the idea, but Lydia stared at him.

"What on earth are you made of?" she asked.

"It sounds unreasonable to you? But, if you think of it, there's nothing unreasonable really. If we're all going to carry this through in a high-minded way, there's no more reason why I shouldn't buy, or rent, Dingle's house than anybody else."

"Except me," said Medora. "And mother's right there. I wonder at you thinking of such a thing, and putting me in such a false position — seeing his ghost at every corner, and hearing him whistling at every turn. You haven't got no imagination, Jordan. I wouldn't go back to that house or cross the threshold, not if it was built of gold with diamond windows."

"I stand corrected," answered Kellock mildly. "As for imagination, Medora, you mustn't think I lack for that. I've got my vision, else I shouldn't have done what I have done, or be going to do what I hope to do; but I grant that while the house is only bricks and mortar to me, like another, it means more to you — a prison and a place of torment."

"Tom-foolery!" said Lydia. "Nobody ever tormented Medora but her own silly self, and if you'd got half the sense you think you've got, Jordan Kellock, you'd have found that out long ago. However, you will find it out; and I say it before her, for I'd never say a word behind her back that I'd fear to say to her face. You've took her at her own valuation."

"No — no," he replied, flushing. "I take her at a much higher valuation than her own. I want to put her in a place worthy of her, where she can expand, and be herself, and reveal what she really is. I want for Medora to show the world all that's hid in her. She doesn't know

herself yet; but I know her, and I'm going to help her to let the world see what she is. And I hope as you're not for us, at any rate, you won't be against us, Mrs. Trivett."

"If anybody had told me you'd ever do a thing like this, I wouldn't have believed them," she answered. "I'm not going to pretend to you, or Medora either, that I'm on your side. I think you've done a very wicked thing, and what beats me, and will always beat me, is how such a man as you could have done it."

"But I don't think I've done a wicked thing, Mrs. Trivett. I only ask you not to judge. It's no good talking or explaining all the thousand and one points that decided me. I only ask you to give me credit on the strength of my past, and to understand I'm no headstrong, silly creature who dashes at a thing on impulse, regardless of the consequences to the community at large. Nobody can say of me I haven't got a proper respect for the community."

"It's her husband you ought to have respected I should think."

"You mustn't ask that. When I remember the way he treated Medora, I can't respect Mr. Dingle. Otherwise these things wouldn't have happened. I admit I love Medora and always did do; but I can honestly say that if Medora had been nothing to me, I should none the less have tried to save her from such a fate, for common good feeling to humanity at large. Being as she was and finding, as she did, that she could love me, of course that simplified it and made it possible for me to put her in the strong and unassailable position of my future wife."

"Stuff and nonsense," answered Lydia. "You think all this, and I suppose you really believe all this; but you're blinded by being in love with my daughter. However the mischief's done now. Only I want you both to understand that you'll get no sympathy from me — or anybody else."

"We don't want no sympathy," declared Medora.

"We've got each other and we don't expect a little country place like this to understand."

Jordan dwelt upon a word that Mrs. Trivett had spoken.

"You say 'the mischief is done,' but I can't allow that. No mischief is done at all — far from it. The mischief would have been if Medora and her husband had been bound to stop together — chained together against all their proper feelings and against all decency. But for them to separate like responsible beings was no mischief."

"And it's up to him to get on with it," added Medora. "We've done our share and took the law in our hands, because we were fearless and knew we were right; and more we can't do until he acts."

"Has he moved in the matter, Mrs. Trivett?" enquired Kellock. "I can supply his lawyer with the necessary data."

Lydia flushed.

"No; he's done nothing to my knowledge. He's got to think of himself and his future work."

"He'll be reasonable I'm sure. The world being what it is — a very critical place — I'm exceedingly jealous for Medora's good name."

"In common decency and duty I should think he ought to feel the same," said Medora. "He can't martyr me no more and the least he can do is to set me free the first moment possible. He's took ten years off my life and my looks; and that's about enough."

"No, he hasn't," returned her mother. "You're looking a lot better than you deserve to look, and as to decency and duty, there's nobody here will come to you to learn about either. You're no more a martyr than anybody else. Ned's the martyr, and it ill becomes you to talk of him in that hateful tone of voice."

Kellock was much pained and Medora began to cry.

"I do implore you — I do implore you, Mrs. Trivett, to think about this subject on a lofty plane. God's my

judge I have taken as high a line about this as I knew how to take. We've looked at it in a religious spirit and had every respect for our own characters and every respect for Mr. Dingle. That's the truth about it. I don't want to preach or explain how we saw our duty, because in your present biased frame of mind, you wouldn't believe me; but I may say that Medora is a sacred object in my eyes — just as sacred as anybody else's property is sacred — and I'd no more treat her with less reverence and honour than I always did before and after she married, than I'd treat any other woman. I'm not going to do anything on which I could look back with a sigh, or her with a blush. We're not that sort by any means."

"I should hope not," murmured Medora. "We're a lot too proud to explain ourselves to such people as live here; we move on a higher walk of conscience than what they do, but all I know is that Jordan's a saint and they're not worthy to black his boots or tie the laces."

Through tears she spoke.

"No, I'm not a saint; but I'm a reasonable man and know what's due to my reputation and my peace of mind," declared Mr. Kellock, "and knowing that, I abide by it and don't risk losing the only thing that matters, and don't put myself in such a position that Medora shall ever think less of me than she does now."

"I think more of you — more of you every minute of my life!" sobbed Medora.

"So there it is, Mrs. Trivett," summed up the man. "I'm glad you called and I wish it was in my power to make you see the light in this matter. But we shall appeal to the future and we're not in the least afraid of the verdict of posterity. There's no support like the consciousness of right. In fact for my part I'd never take on anything, big or little, if I didn't feel to the bed-rock of my conscience it was right. And one thing you can be quite sure about, and that is that your daughter is as safe in my hands as it is humanly possible for her to be."

Mrs. Trivett looked at him helplessly and then at her weeping child.

"You're one too many for me, Jordan Kellock," she said. "You've thrown over every law and gone the limit so far as I can see; and yet you talk about your honour and Medora's as the only thing you really care about. You're beyond me, both of you, and I think I'll wish you good evening."

"I feel perfectly sure that light will come into your mind as the future unfolds itself, Mrs. Trivett."

"I hope so," she answered; "but your idea of light and mine ain't the same and never will be — unless you change."

"There's no shadow of changing with me," he answered. "Medora's the first thing in my life henceforth and, though you don't agree with us, I hope you'll reach a frame of mind when you'll respect us as we respect ourselves."

"You might stop to tea, mother," suggested Medora, but Mrs. Trivett declined.

"I don't want to talk no more," she said, "so I'll go; and you needn't think I'm an enemy or anything of that. I'm your mother, Medora, and I'm about the most puzzled mother living this minute."

Lydia went away deeply mystified and disliking Kellock more than when she had come. Yet she told herself it was folly to dislike him. He was no hypocrite, and though his sentiments had seemed ridiculous in any other mouth, they were really proper to his.

CHAPTER XVII

TRAGEDY IN THE SIZING ROOM

JORDAN KELLOCK accepted the attitude of the Mill to his achievement with as little emotion as possible. He concealed his own feelings, and since he did not attach great importance to the opinions of his fellow workers, their jests or silence were alike indifferent to him. He was conscious of well-doing and felt no doubt that the future would serve amply to justify his action.

He worked as usual and presently discovered that neither Ernest Trood, the foreman, nor Matthew Trenchard himself proposed to discuss his private affairs with him. The master never mentioned it, and when he met Kellock, shook hands with his usual large friendliness and trusted the vatman had enjoyed his holiday.

"You went to the Exhibition I hope?" he asked. And Jordan replied that he had done so.

"Our pictures made a proper sensation," he declared. "I stood by and watched the public for an hour, and the people were more astonished at our water-mark pictures than anything in the show."

"You shall see what the press said," replied Trenchard. "We've had very good notices about it and far beyond the trade too. Art papers have taken up water-marks and pointed out what I told you long ago, that the craft ought to have a great future."

Of Medora nothing was said, but Trood mentioned her briefly a few days later. He took Kellock aside.

"It's official, and no more," he remarked. "But I suppose you stand for Mrs. Dingle now, and are going to marry her as soon as it can be done?"

"That is so, Trood."

"Well, she went away without warning, and forfeits her money accordingly. You know the law on that subject."

"That's all right," said Kellock. "She didn't mean nothing uncivil or improper, but the circumstances required her to act as she did."

Trood nodded and left him. In common with most of the other responsible men in the Mill, he never addressed Kellock on the subject of Medora. Jordan noticed this, and felt that though people abstained from comment, his action had created a body of opinion that was to some extent unfriendly. None hesitated to regret the departure of Ned Dingle, and none attempted to conceal that regret in the presence of Kellock. A few men refused to recognise him farther, and when he saluted them as usual, cut him. Robert Life was one of these, and he found that those who came immediately under the influence of Nicholas Pinhey — the men at the glazing rollers — had been imbued with particular animosity. There Medora herself had worked.

As for her, she lived through a familiar experience, and discovered that anticipation is greater than reality, both for good and evil. She had built up a very elaborate picture of her return to Dene, and of the attitude of her circle. It was a vision wherein she occupied the centre, as a being mysterious and arresting, a figure to challenge hatred, or enthusiasm, a compelling heroine, who might provoke furious enemies, or win loyal friends, but could by no possibility leave anyone indifferent. She had pictured herself as the protagonist, the cynosure, the paramount object of interest. When she walked abroad in her London clothes, all eyes would be upon her, and she would move among them, gentle, indifferent, inscrutable, her secrets hidden, herself doubtless a subject of ceaseless and heated discussion.

But she missed the least consciousness of creating a sensation; she even missed the unpleasantness which she

had designed to endure so finely, that Jordan might see the superb stuff of which she was really made. The limelight of public attention was wanting, and her return fell almost as flat as when she had come home from her honeymoon with Ned Dingle. So far as Medora could see, nobody really cared a button about her. She met with the same experiences as Jordan, but took them differently. He returned to his occupation and, in the full tide of work, was able to keep his mind free of his private affairs, and find other interests among his fellow craftsmen. But Medora had no distraction during this period. She possessed not even a house to look after, until Kellock found a house. Following on the first clash with her fellow creatures, and the discovery that some were amiable as usual, and some unprepared to recognise her, or have anything more to do with her, Medora began to be unspeakably bored with life and this flat anticlimax. The spring days dragged, and she knew not how to fill them. But her partner, perceiving this, set her a variety of tasks, and she found herself making notes for him from books, and copying extracts out of speeches delivered by the leaders of labour's cause. At first she performed her tasks with energy, and Kellock praised her devotion; but he blamed her handwriting, which was very indifferent.

"Some day I'll run to a typewriter," he had promised.

The matter upon which he occupied her quite failed to interest Medora. It was dreary in itself and depressing in all that it implied, because their future, so far as she could see, held mighty little promise of much comfort or prosperity, if Jordan proposed to devote his life to these thorny and controversial subjects. It was magnificent, and might mean fame for him after he was dead; but promised remarkably little fun for Mrs. Kellock in the meantime.

Daisy Finch proved faithful and often came to see Medora at "The Waterman's Arms." She believed that the opposition need not be taken seriously.

"It's only a nine days' wonder," declared Daisy. "When you're married to Mr. Kellock, everybody will come round."

Then Miss Finch plunged into her own affairs. She was betrothed to Kellock's cou cher at the Mill, one Harold Spry.

"And your mother thinks he's a very sensible man, and we're going into Paignton on Saturday, by the motor bus for him to buy me a proper engagement ring."

"He's a very good cou cher, for I've heard Jordan say so; and I know he's very nice looking, and I'm very glad about it, Daisy. It's good news, for certain."

"I never encouraged him, I'm sure," declared Miss Finch, "but I always felt greatly addicted to him in a manner of speaking, Medora."

"I hope you'll be happy, but don't hurry it; get to know each other's natures well, and all that. And if you find you can't agree about anything that's vital to happiness, then part before it's too late," said her friend. "It isn't given to every girl to do what I did, Daisy. You want a rare lot of courage, and the power to rise superior to the world against you."

"He agrees with me in everything," said Daisy.

"They always begin like that. But I feel you're going to be one of the happy ones."

"And you, too, I hope soon."

"There are greater things than happiness, I find," confessed Medora, "though like all young creatures, I used to put happiness first and last. But if you've got much in the way of brains, you can't be happy for long. Jordan very soon learned me that."

"Surely to God he's going to make you happy?" asked Daisy.

"Oh, yes, but it's the happiness of people at large he's out for. He's got a great mind and thinks in numbers, not in individuals, even though one of them's his wife. That may sound sad to you."

"It do," said Daisy.

"But it isn't really. It makes you forget yourself — in time. I shall rise to it as I age, and I'm ageing fast."

"I don't want to forget myself," said Daisy, "and I'm sure Mr. Spry wouldn't let me if I did. He's death on spoiling me."

"Be happy while you can," advised Medora. "And bring your young man to supper one night."

They talked of the works, for despite the larger interests of Kellock, Medora still found the politics of the Mill her chief subject.

"Do you think they'd be nasty if I was to go in one day on some pretence and see 'em?" she asked.

Daisy considered.

"You'd be welcome for your mother's sake in the rag house," she answered; "but I wouldn't go in your own shop, if I was you. I dare say it's jealousy, but the women in the glazing shop — it's old Pinhey's fault largely, I believe. He's a religious old devil."

"For some things I'd almost like to be back again," declared Medora. "Just for the minute, till we've got a house and so on, I'm at a loose end. I do a lot of writing for Jordan, and he finds me very useful, and is going to get me a typewriter. But just for the minute — it would distract my mind. There's nothing small about Mr. Trenchard — he'd let me come back, I reckon."

Daisy did not venture an opinion, and the talk returned to Harold Spry. But from that day, Medora's determination to go into the works increased. She did not tell Jordan, suspecting that he would have forbidden such an experiment, nor did she mention the matter to her mother; but she decided that she would stroll in some day.

Ned Dingle had not yet left Dene, and once she passed him returning home from Totnes. He took no notice of her, and she hesitated whether to speak, but perceived that he desired no such thing, for he hurried past. She stole one glance under her eyelids at him, and thought he

looked much as usual. He stared straight in front of him, and blushed as he passed her.

She mentioned the incident to Kellock.

"I haven't seen him yet," he said. "He hasn't got work to his liking, so Knox tells me. I'm waiting to hear from him."

Two days later, Medora took her courage in her hands, and went up to the Mill at eleven o'clock, while work was in full swing. She had considered where to go, and decided that she would drop into the vat room and speak to Jordan about some trivial matter. She took an addition to his dinner in the shape of an orange. But having actually arrived, an inspiration led her to the sizing room. Thither came the paper from the drying lofts, and the simple work was done by little girls. No sharp word or unpleasant attitude of mind was likely to reach her there.

She entered unseen, and passed through the dim and odorous chambers where the sizerman, old Amos Toft, mixed the medium. Here, in two steaming vats, Amos melted his gelatine, made of buffalo hide, and added to the strong-smelling concoction those ingredients proper to the paper to be sized. Trade secrets controlled the mixture, but alum contributed an important factor, for without it, the animal compound had quickly decayed.

In the sizing room a narrow passage ran between long troughs. The place steamed to its lofty, sunny roof, and was soaked with the odour of the size. Through the great baths of amber-coloured liquid there wound an endless wool blanket, and at one end of each great bath sat two little girls with stacks of dry paper beside them. They disposed the sheets regularly two together on the sizing felt, and the paper was drawn into the vats and plunged beneath the surface. For nearly three minutes it pursued its invisible way, and presently, emerging at the other end, was lifted off by other young workers and returned to the drying lofts again.

Little Mercy Life, the vatman's daughter, was sizing some pretty, rose-coloured sheets, and Medora admired them.

"Well, Mercy, how are you?" she asked, and the child smiled and said she was very well.

"What lovely paper! And how are you, Nelly? How's your sister?"

"To home still," said Mercy's companion, "but the doctor says she'll get well some day."

An impulse brought the orange out of Medora's pocket.

"Here's something for you," she said. "You can share it between you presently."

They thanked her, and chatted happily enough about their work and play. Medora told them that she had been in London, and interested them with what she saw at the Zoological Gardens.

"My! To think!" said Mercy. "I thought squirrels was always red."

A few adults passed through the sizing house, among them Mr. Trood. He hesitated, seemed surprised to see her, but said "good morning," not unpleasantly, and hoped she was all right.

"I dare say you half wish you were back again, Medora?" he asked, and she jumped at the suggestion and told him that she often did.

"Just peeped in for the pleasure of seeing friends," she said.

He went his way and Medora was about to leave the children and seek Kellock, when an adventure very painful befell her.

For old Amos Toft belonged to the tribe of Mr. Pinhey. He was inflamed with indignation at the spectacle of Medora contaminating youth, and departed presently that he might tell Mrs. Life, in the glazing shop, what was happening. Whereupon, Mercy Life, the elder, leapt from her stool at the crib, and much incensed, hastened to her child's protection.

Medora greeted her with a smile, but it vanished before the other's sharp challenge.

They were talking of primroses at the time, for Nelly and Mercy had plucked a great bunch on Sunday and promised to bring some to Medora. They were to come to tea with her when they could.

"Here — I'll thank you to get out of this, Mrs. — whatever you call yourself!" began the angry woman.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Medora, "and who are you to tell me what I'm to do? Where's your manners?"

The other snorted scornfully.

"You brazen-faced thing," she cried. "Yes, a front of brass to come here, or show your face among honest women I should think. But you can't have it both ways. You can't be a friend for children and give 'em oranges — give it back, Mercy — and be a scarlet woman both. And I won't have you talking to my child anyway."

Medora adopted a superior tone. She took the orange from the girl and addressed her.

"I'm sorry you've got such a fool for a mother, Mercy. And I hope when you grow up, you'll have more sense than she has."

Then she addressed Mrs. Life.

"How little you understand," she said. "I'm sorry for you being such a narrow-minded creature. I always thought you was one of the sensible sort. And you needn't fear for your little girl. I was only asking her to come to tea and bring me some primroses."

She marched out, regardless of Mrs. Life's reply, and went to seek Jordan who was at his vat making big paper. He handled a heavy mould and passed over snow-white sheets to his coucher, who turned them on to the felt with extreme care. Jordan became very nervous at sight of Medora, but she felt quite at ease among the men and none in the vat room quarrelled with her. She congratulated Harold Spry on his engagement and told him that

Daisy was a treasure. Then she gave Kellock the orange and watched him.

But Medora was only hiding herself. Her heart flamed and her indignation at the recent affront burned fiercely within her. Her sole purpose at that moment was to get level and more than level with Mrs. Life, whose husband worked at the vat next to Jordan's, and she now turned on him unwisely and addressed him. He was employed with brilliant, orange-coloured pulp and making currency paper.

"You tell your wife to be broader-minded, Robert Life," she said suddenly, and he stared at her.

"She's broad-minded enough for me and all God-fearing creatures I believe," he answered. "If you want to keep on the narrow path, you've got to be narrow-minded about some things, young woman."

This was too much for Kellock. His pale face flushed. He set down his mould, dried his hands and beckoned to Medora.

"I want to speak to you for five minutes," he said and they moved together into the open space outside the vat house. But she gave him no time to speak. She poured out her wrongs in a flood.

"It's up to you now," she said. "This isn't going on. I'm not going to have my life made a burden by every beastly, cross-grained cat in Dene for you, or anybody. An ignorant creature like her to call me a bad woman! That's the limit."

"You must be patient," he said. "You shouldn't have come, Medora. It was a very doubtful thing to do. You must allow for people. We've talked all this out before."

"If we've done right, we've done right," she answered; "and if we've done right, it isn't for me to sit down under insult, or for you to let me be insulted. I was born a fighter and you say you was; and if so, you'd best to begin with fighting your future wife's enemies."

"That's all right," he admitted. "But I ask you to be reasonable. It wasn't reasonable to come here and face the women."

"I didn't face the women then. I didn't go near 'em. I was only asking a child or two to come into tea. Then that sour slattern, Mercy Life, flew at me as if I'd come to poison her little girl. And I want to know what you're going to do about it; and I've a right to know."

"Keep calm, keep calm and go home, Medora. Go back to the 'Arms.' We'll talk about it to-night. It's hard waiting, but —"

"I won't wait. I've no right to be asked to wait."

"Well, as to that, we've got to wait. You say it's up to me. But you know different."

"I'll drown myself if there's much more of it — God's my judge," vowed Medora, then she went her way as the bell rang the dinner hour.

Kellock felt deeply perturbed, and was glad of the interval, for he could not have resumed his work just then. He ate his meal alone and then wandered up the valley with painful thoughts for companions. That Medora could have done so foolish and inconsiderate a thing surprised him harshly. It was part of his illusion concerning her that she was a girl of unusual reasoning powers and excellent mental endowments. Once or twice, indeed, she had said and done what cast a shadow on this conviction; but never had she indicated the possibility of such a futile act as this. That she should have come to the Mill at her own inclination appeared flagrantly foolish.

But that evening, in face of her tears and hysterical emotion, he undertook to anticipate the position and hasten the solution if possible. Not, indeed, until he promised to seek out Ned Dingle and demand action from him, did Medora recover. Then she was herself again, humble and grateful and penitent and full of admiration for Jordan.

"You're so large-minded and look at things with a male grasp and a male's power of waiting," she said, "but

you can't expect that from me. You must make allowances, Jordan. I suffer a lot more than you do, because I've got such a power of feeling and I'm cruel proud."

"I'm properly jealous for you," he answered, "and I'd come between every breath of scandal and you if I could. But we must allow for human nature and prejudice."

"And jealousy," she said.

"We must allow for the outlook of every-day people and give 'em as little chance to scoff as possible. I'll put it to Mr. Dingle the first minute I can; and you must do your part, Medora, and lie low till I've seen him and shown him his duty."

CHAPTER XVIII

NED HEARS MR. KNOX

KELLOCK thought twice about going to see Ned Dingle, for instinct told him that what might seem a reasonable course to such a reasonable being as himself, would possibly appear in another light to Medora's husband. But he reflected that, as the more intelligent and better educated man, it was his place to act. Even should Dingle use violence, that much he must be prepared to face, if by so doing he could advance the situation between them.

Ned was still at his house, and, on an evening in early April, when the trees of Ashprington were washed with green again and the white blossoms of the pears opened ghostly to the embrace of the east wind, Jordan called.

Ned himself opened the door.

"You!" he said. "What the hell do you want? I've kept off you — God knows how. Are you asking for it?"

"I want to do what's right, Mr. Dingle. I haven't come for any less reason. I beg you'll let me speak to you."

Ned breathed through his nostrils and did not reply immediately. At last he answered.

"To do what's right! You'll never do what's right, because you're a hypocrite, and all your talk about helping labour and the rest of it is humbug and lies coming from a thing like you. You're the worst sort of man — the sort that does his dirty work behind a lot of cant and pretended virtue and honesty. The gutter's too good for you."

"I can see your point of view; but after her letter, you

ought to think different. I say nothing about mine; but hers was all it ought to be under the circumstances."

"You dare to say that? All it ought to be? Did you read it?"

"Yes, I did."

"And thought it right for her to say I was 'a godless beast' where she was concerned?"

"She never said nothing like that, Mr. Dingle."

"Come in then," said the other shortly. "You come in and sit down and read what she said."

They went into the kitchen, and Ned lighted a candle. Then he took out his pocket book, produced Medora's letter, and flung it on the table.

"Read that, please."

Kellock obeyed, and his face grew long. It was clear that Medora had not sent the letter they concocted so carefully together in the Priory ruin. He put it down.

"Was that the only letter you got from her, if I may ask?"

"It was."

"I never heard nothing about this letter."

"You're lying I expect when you say that."

"Indeed, I am not. I never lie. This letter was evidently the result of temper. She never meant it. It's a sort of play-acting — all females indulge in it."

"She meant every word. But you're right, there's a lot of play-acting about the whole business. She's been play-acting ever since she was born, and now she'll damned soon find that's ended. Life with you won't be play-acting."

"It will not," answered Kellock. "I promise her that. But she's no dreamer. If you'll be so patient as to listen to me, I'd like to speak a few words for her and myself. That letter is not Medora — not what she is now. She shall say she's sorry, and write in her present frame of mind, which is very different."

"She'll be sorry all right. That won't be a lie anyway."

"I venture to ask you to look ahead, Mr. Dingle. There's no doubt, owing to one thing and another, you and her wouldn't have settled down into a happy husband and wife. That's not to cast any reflection on you, or her either. You wasn't made for each other as we all thought, myself included, when she took you. But owing to differences of character and such like, she fretted you by her nature, which she couldn't alter, and you treated her harsh according to your nature, which you couldn't change. There it was, and her spirit told her you and her must part. She meant to go I solemnly assure you. She'd made up her mind to do that; and finding it was so — that's where I came in. I thought she was right, for her self-respect and yours, to leave you, and knowing that she would then be free in every real sense, I, who had loved her in the past, felt it was no wrong to you under the circumstances, to love her again. But I'll say this, and I hope you'll believe it: if I had thought Medora was wrong, I wouldn't have taken her part. You'll remember I spoke to you as an outsider, and only for your good, when you knocked me in the water. I'd no thought of having Medora for my wife till after that happened. But when she made me see clearly she was a martyred creature, then I took a different line. And that's how we stand."

"Play-acting still," answered the other. "It's all play-acting, and a wicked, heartless piece of work; and you know it. And a brainless piece of work too, for all you think you're such a smart pair. You see I'm calm. I'm not taking you by the scruff of your neck and battering your head against that wall, as I well might do. I may yet; but I'll answer you first. You knew Medora, and knew she was a mass of airs and graces, and humbug; and you knew me, and therefore you ought to have known, when she said I was a tyrant and a brute, that she was

lying. But you fooled yourself and took her word and made yourself believe her, because you wanted her. You lusted after another man's wife, and all your fine opinions went to hell under the temptation, when you found you could get her so easy."

"Don't say that; I beg you not to put it in that way. I'm not that sort of man."

"I judge of a man by what he does, not by what he says. That's what you've done, and that's what you'll pay for sooner or late."

"A time will come when you'll withdraw that, Mr. Dingle. It's a cruel libel on my character and you'll live to know it. At present I'm only wishful to do things decently and in order, and I'll ask you again to look forward. I should be very glad to know, please, when you're going to go on with this? I venture to think you ought to move in the matter."

"You beat anything I've ever heard of," said Dingle. "What are you made of — flesh and blood, or stone? To tell me my duty!"

"Why not, if you don't see it? I'm not thinking of myself — only the situation as it affects her."

"And I'm thinking of it as it affects me. I've been pretty badly damaged in this racket — the lawyer's made that clear to me. I shall get it out of you somehow — how I don't know at present. You can clear now, and I shan't come to you to decide what I'm going to do about it — or to that wicked, little fool either. Yes, a wicked, little fool — that's what she is — and she'll look at home presently, when you've knocked the life out of her, and find it out for herself."

Kellock rose and prepared to depart.

"I'm sorry I called if it was only to anger you," he said.

"Yes; and you'll be sorry for lots of things presently I shouldn't wonder. You're a fool too, come to think of

it — that's part of my revenge I reckon — to know you, who thought yourself so wonderful, are only a young fool after all."

So the interview ended and Kellock went his way outwardly unruffled but inwardly perturbed. He had never considered the possibility of Dingle doing anything in the way of damages. He had, in fact, thought far too little about Dingle. Ned was a man of no force of character and he had assumed that he would proceed upon the conventional lines proper to such cases. But Ned's very weakness now grew into a danger, because he was evidently in the hands of a lawyer and might be easily influenced by a stronger will than his own. The law would probably not learn the real human facts of the situation as between Ned and Medora. The law never did go into these subtleties of character upon which such things depended. Superficially the law might hold him, what he — Kellock — was so far from being, and perhaps actually punish him in his pocket — an event that had not entered his calculations. Did Dingle make any such claim, it would certainly be his place to plead against it, or get a lawyer to do so for him. He felt anxious, for he feared the law and knew it to be a terribly costly matter to defend the most righteous cause.

And meantime Ned received another caller, who knew Kellock better than he did, and left him with some curious information to consider. Indeed it was not Jordan's own visit that threw any new light on Jordan, but that of an older man. Philander Knox now arrived to see Dingle on private business.

Philander, true to his philosophic and tolerant attitude, had not evinced any unfriendly feelings towards Kellock on his return to the vat house, and the paper makers, who were all junior to Mr. Knox, followed his lead with the exception of Robert Life, who took his wife's view of the situation. Thus it came about that finding Knox to be impartial and knowing him for a large-minded

man, only puzzling when he displayed humour, which Kellock did not understand, Jordan had to some extent confided in him and revealed various facts concerning his opinions and his relations with Medora. These, while imparted in confidence, possessed none the less very considerable significance and Philander was now tempted to use his information.

It depended on the trend of his conversation with Dingle whether he would do so, for he called upon his own affairs and had no intention, when he arrived, to touch those of other people.

He came by appointment on the subject of Dingle's house.

"I'd like it very well," he said, "and I'd close to-night if I was in a position to do so; but though hopeful as my custom is, for hope costs nothing, I'm not able yet to close definitely."

"There's one or two after it, I must tell you."

"I know. But I'll make a bargain. To let the house is, of course, a certainty. Houses are so few in these parts that a fine quality of house like this don't go begging very long; but if you'll stand by and give me first refusal for a clear month, I'll pay you two quid down on the nail for the privilege."

Dingle considered.

"All right," he said. "That's a bargain. There's nothing settled and I'd be very well pleased for you to have the house. But what are you waiting for?"

"That's private," answered Philander bringing out his purse and depositing two sovereigns. "I'm waiting for another party to come to a decision on a certain subject. If it goes right, I'll take your house; if it don't, then I shan't have no use for it."

Dingle nodded.

"I guess your meaning," he said. "As for me, I'm marking time, though I can't much longer. I must go on with my work and I've got a very good offer for Liverpool;

but I don't see myself in a town somehow. And there's people at Ivybridge could do with me; but the money's less. I'm all over the shop, to be honest. Of course it won't go no farther. But I can trust you. I keep a stiff upper-lip, being a man; but this have knocked the stuffing out of me. I don't care what becomes of me really, though of course I pretend I'm all right."

Knox nodded.

"You've took a very proper line in the opinion of me and Mrs. Trivett," he said. "Mrs. Trivett shares your feelings about it. As for me, I'm properly sorry, because one can't do nothing to help. She's done for herself now, and she'll smart long after you've done smarting, if that's any consolation."

"I know; but I don't want her to smart particular," said Ned. "She's been sinned against — took at her own ridiculous valuation. She had to be herself, poor wretch; but the more I think of it — I ain't sure now if it wouldn't be best to break that man's neck, Knox. Yes, I reckon I'll go to Liverpool. I don't want to bide here within a few miles of her. A clean break's the best. How's the new beaterman going on?"

"None too well. Trenchard don't like him and Trood hates him. He told Trood to mind his own business last week; and coming from Bulstrode — Bulstrode's his name — to the foreman, that was a startler. In fact Trood won't be himself till Bulstrode's gone now. He's a doomed man you may say. Then there was a little affair with Trenchard too. He wants some more of the advertisements made — the pictures — and he explained the pulp to Bulstrode, and Bulstrode, good though he is at everyday work, have a rigid mind and said he was there to make paper pulp, not do conjuring tricks. An unyielding sort of man in fact; and though of course he's doing what he's told as well as he can, he don't like it, and no doubt he'll soon be gone."

"He was here a bit ago — Kellock, I mean," said Ned.

"I often wonder how I keep my hands off the man that's ruined my home; but so far I have. There's something uncanny to him. He ain't human, Knox. He's got a something else in him that puts him outside the run of humans. A bit of fish or frog. I ain't frightened of smiting him; I may come to it; but I can't explain. He's not like other people. I always feel he's an image — a machine made to look and talk like a man."

"I understand that. If another chap had done this, I should have expected you to go for him; but I quite see the case is altered with Kellock. Because you feel he's not stuffed with the same stuffing as most of us. Stop me if I'm on dangerous ground; but such a man has the qualities of his failings. He's got a properly absurd side — like all such owl-like people, who never laugh. He's a crank and amazingly ignorant in some directions. If he don't approve of the law, he won't obey it. He puts religion and morals higher than law; but he brews his own religion and don't know in his innocence that religion in this country always does what the State tells it. You'd think religion might up and speak to the law, in the name of its Master sometimes. Kellock pointed that out. He would do things and talk to the law if he had the power, because he's fearless and doesn't waste his energy, but concentrates. He said, speaking of natural children, that under our laws they were treated with wicked injustice. He said to me about it, 'If the Archbishop of Canterbury got up in the House of Lords and said that it was a black, damnable disgrace to England to have such a law blotting the Statute Book and leaving us behind Scotland and Germany and America — if he did that, all men and women of good will would support him and the State would have to end the loathsome scandal.' But I told him to hope nothing either from bishops or lawyers. 'The man who alters that infamous law will be somebody bigger than either one or t'other,' I told Kellock. 'He'll be a brave man, ashamed to face both ways and sit on the fence for his own safety;

and he'll be a man who knows that mankind wasn't made for the lawyers, but the lawyers for mankind.' There are such men still, thank God."

"Kellock ain't human, so how should he care for the ways of the world? It's a blind to his villainy."

"I've had a good deal of speech with him of late and heard his opinions. He's dead sure he's right. It's all in a nutshell. He had to rescue your wife from you, and now he's as jealous for her as a hen with one chick. It's damned hard to look at the situation from his point of view, Dingle — hard for me or anybody — and impossible for you; but he sees it in a certain way and no doubt she's helped him to do so. And now he won't have a breath on her name and feels he's got to stand between her and the rest of the world. He smarts worse than she does when hard things are said. He's a lot more high strung than your wife herself. In fact he's so delicate about her that he'd rather die than leave her in a false position. It's an attitude that would be cant in most chaps, but coming from him you're bound to believe it. It may be part fish or frog, as you say; but so it is. Of course nobody who didn't know him would believe it; but I do believe it."

"Believe what?" asked Dingle.

"Believe she's not married to him."

"That's certain while she's married to me."

"I don't mean that. I mean Kellock's not all a man, as I've just said. You may say he's a bit of a saint, or you may say he's only half baked; but say what you like, the fact remains he's different from other men and his opinions guide his conduct, which is a lot more than opinions always do. He's told me that she's not his wife in any sort of way — far too much respect for her and himself. That's gospel you may be sure, for he'd rather die than lie."

"She'll soon get fed up with that," said Dingle.

"Sooner than him I dare say; but so it is, and I'm glad to let you know it. I shook him by telling him he was a child in these things and that the law would refuse to let

you divorce Mrs. Dingle if it knew he was not fulfilling its requirements. But he's got a feeling of contempt for the divorce laws which, of course, every decent man must share — a feeling of contempt which extends to the lawyers who live by them, and the parsons who like 'em. I give him all credit there."

"And how do these fine ideas strike my wife that was?" asked Ned. "Because if I knew anything about her in her palmy days, she was built of quite different mud from that."

"How it strikes her I can't tell you, because her opinions are hid from me. Perhaps Mrs. Trivett's heard her views upon the subject. She may not agree with Kellock; but more likely he's made her do so — especially seeing it won't pay her to have any other opinions than his in future."

"He'll never break her in, Knox."

"He will, give him time. There's something about him that makes weaker wills go down sooner or late. He's like the tide. He will come on. He'll settle her all right."

"She deserves what she'll get anyway."

"If she do, she's one in a thousand," answered Knox, "for in my experience we always get more or less than we deserve, never a fair, honest deal. You can't tell what she's going to get, but you can bet your boots it won't be what she deserves. Be it as it will, you're in the position of Providence to both of them; because whatever she may think about it, we know what he does. He's in your hand — to make, or mar, so far as Medora's concerned. I tell you for friendship, and to a man like myself, who loves a joke, these things are funny in a manner of speaking."

"The question is if they're true."

"They're true as sure as Kellock is true. Make no mistake about that."

"Well, I'm not the sort to stab in the dark, though that's how they served me. But I don't feel no particular call to put myself out of the way for either of 'em. You

can't get this job through for nothing, and I've got no spare cash for the minute."

"They chose their own time to run; they must await yours for the rest," admitted Mr. Knox.

CHAPTER XIX

EMOTIONS OF MEDORA

WHEN Jordan returned to Medora, by a quality of our common nature which he would have been the first to deprecate, he was not entirely sorry to bring her unpleasant news. To himself he said that a trial of her patience would be good for her character, and so explained his own frame of mind; but the truth was different. He had heard something concerning Medora which annoyed him and made him anxious; and the result of his annoyance was that he imparted painful facts without any very great regret. It was true that they affected him as well as his future wife, but his nature was qualified to bear them far better than was hers.

"I am a great deal hurt," he began, as they sat together in their little parlour at the inn.

"You were bound to be," she answered. "And you might have been hurt in body as well as in mind. It's something if he's enough broken in to treat you properly."

"As to that, he did. I'll come to him. But what's hurt me, Medora, a long way worse than anything Mr. Dingle had to say has got to do with you."

"If you've been believing his lies —"

"It ain't so much his lies as yours. I'm not one to use hard words as a rule. But it's your letter to him."

"Well, what about it?"

"I've read it — that's all."

She realised the significance of this and blushed hotly.

"Why didn't you send the letter I helped you to write?" he asked.

"Because — because when you're boiling with injustice and wicked injury — when I read it, I saw it was you and not me. He'd have known you wrote it, yet it was to be my letter; so I made it mine and told him the ugly truth about himself, which you'd been careful not to do. According to your letter, there was no reason why I should leave him at all that I could see. It was that nice and cool. But I was going to do things that you don't do when you're nice and cool, so I told him the truth straight out, as he deserved to hear it. It's no good mincing your meaning with a man like him."

"You told me you'd sent our letter, however."

"I couldn't when I came to read it. It was a silly letter."

"Well, I'm not one to go back to the past, because it's generally a waste of time, Medora. It would have been honester if you'd told me the truth. Your letter was pretty hot, certainly."

"I hope he found it so."

"He did, and unfortunately he's kept it. If he'd been wiser than he is, he'd have burned it; instead of that he's letting it burn him, if you understand me. From the look of the letter, I should say he'd read it a great many times and the result is that he's still in a very bad frame of mind."

"What frame of mind did you think he'd be in? We can't all keep a hand on ourselves, like you."

"I hoped that time enough had passed over him to steady him. But I can't honestly say it has. He made some curious remarks. I thought once he was going to let himself go and fly at me. But I kept my eye on him and never raised my voice. There's plenty of good qualities in him."

"I'm glad you're so pleased with him," she said, growing hot again. "Naturally you think well of a man who's used me so kindly!"

"No, I'm not much pleased with him. In fact, quite the

reverse, Medora. There's good in everybody — that's all I mean. But he's got no good will to us."

"Thank God for that then!"

"You needn't thank God in too much of a hurry. In a word, he's going to take his own time about this business. He's done nothing so far."

"Done nothing!" gasped Medora.

"Nothing whatever."

"That's my letter — the coward."

"I shouldn't have said so to you; but I'm glad you're clever enough to see it, Medora. Yes, your letter no doubt. You can't have anything for nothing in this world, and as you gave yourself the pleasure of telling him what you thought of him, he'll give himself the pleasure apparently of making us pay for your fun."

"'Fun'! A lot you know about fun."

"You wrote what you thought would hurt; and I expect it did hurt; and the result, so far as I can see, is a very nasty and obstinate frame of mind in Mr. Dingle. I won't tell you all he said, though he was more respectful to you than me. But he hasn't done with it by a lot and he'll very likely ask for heavy damages."

"What does that mean?"

"My money, Medora."

"Could he sink to that?"

"It wouldn't be sinking from his point of view. It ain't regarded as sinking by the law. The idea certainly hadn't struck me till I heard him on the subject; but I dare say it will happen. It's within his power."

"Doesn't that show I said nothing in my letter he didn't deserve? A man who'd do that —"

Medora felt a shadow of dislike towards Jordan. It was not the first time that any suspicion of such an alarming sensation had coloured her thoughts before his temperate statements and unimpassioned speeches. Was he never to let himself go? But she fled from her impatience as from a supreme danger. Kellock must be her hero, or

nothing. She must continue to see in him her salvation and her tower of strength; she must let him feel and understand the reverence, the adoration in which she held him and his superb sacrifice on the altar of the conventions. For such a man the things that he had done were greater far than they had been in the case of others. He had his future to think of as well as Medora's. He must not be allowed off his pedestal in her regard for an instant. She realised that, and perceived how her own peace of mind depended entirely on keeping him there. Her histrionic gifts were again to be called to her assistance.

Watchfully she would guard her own mind against any doubt of Jordan's essential qualities. His virtue and valour culminated, of course, in the heroism that had run away with her and rescued her from her dragon. The only weak and unintelligent action impartial judges might have brought against Kellock must be to Medora his supreme expression of masterful will and manly humanity. Even granting his love, indifferent spectators had criticised Kellock most for believing Medora at all, or allowing the assurances of such a volatile person to influence him upon such a crucial matter. His real heroism and distinction of mind was lost upon Medora; the achievements she valued in him belonged to his weakness of imagination and a lack of humour destined to keep him a second class man. He belonged to the order of whom it may be said that they are "great and good," not that they are "great." But the good qualifies — even discounts — the great.

While Jordan had to be supported on his pillar at any cost if Medora's position was to be endurable, conversely it was necessary to preserve her acute sense of Ned Dingle's evil doing. There must be no slackening of her detestation there; and that it now became necessary to practise a large patience with Jordan and take no farther steps to impress upon him her scorn of one so mean and base as Ned, quite distracted Medora. Herein Kellock's composure at first mystified her until he made clear the need for it.

"To reasonable minds like yours and mine," he said, "no doubt it does appear rather improper that we should have to be worldly wise about Mr. Dingle. But, though the wisdom of the world is foolishness in the mind of most clean thinking and honourable men, Medora, especially in a case like this, yet I don't see that we can do anything. We must just bend to the law and mark time, I suppose. I don't go so far as to say we should demean ourselves to cultivate Mr. Dingle and be humble to him, or anything like that; but it's no good going out of the way to vex him more than we are bound to do; because, the law, being what it is — all on his side seemingly, we're more or less powerless and quite in his hands. It's abominably wrong it should be; but we've got to recognise the world as it is, and pay it the hypocrisy that virtue owes to vice sometimes. In fact we've got to keep our nerve and lie low and wait for him. And being what he is — hard and up against us and still smarting under what happened — he may not be moved to do right all in a minute."

"He's making fools of us in fact — that's his low revenge," said Medora.

"He may think so in his ignorance, but he's wrong. Only two people can make fools of us," answered Jordan, "and that's we ourselves. We've took the high line and we're safe accordingly. All he'll get out of delay is the pangs of conscience; and what's more he'll put himself wrong with the rest of the world."

"That's some comfort," said Medora. "They smart most who smart last, I reckon. All the same it's a black-guard thing on his part."

"The law moves a lot slower than human passion," he explained, "and though we say hard speeches against it, there is some advantage in a machine that can't be got to gallop as fast as man's hate. It may happen that, as time goes on, he'll come to see that it's a very unmanly thing to talk about damages, because when it comes to that, what price the damage he inflicted on your heart and nature?

Many a woman would have gone down under the persecution, and it was only your own fine spirit and bed-rock pluck and courage that kept you from doing so."

Medora approved these opinions, for praise was her favourite food, and had Kellock understood the powers of flattery, he had always succeeded in calming her tempests and exacting patience and obedience. But he loved her and his love saw her in roseal light as a rule. He forgave her little turpitudes and bitternesses and ebullitions, for was it not natural that one who had so cruelly suffered should sometimes betray those human weaknesses from which none is free?

And for her, if the man had only been a husband to her, nothing on earth would have shaken her resolution, or weakened her will power. But that he was not, and her state of widowhood proved exceedingly painful to one of Medora's sanguine temperament, though this was the last thing in her heart she could confess to Kellock. She panted in fact for a lover sometimes; yet the consciousness that Jordan never panted for anything of the sort made it impossible to hint at such a human weakness.

She found the line of least resistance was humble surrender to Kellock's high qualities. She abased her spirit at thought of his sacrifice and really saw aright in the question of his love for her. About that she could not make any mistake, for she had a mind quick enough in sundry particulars and sufficiently realised that she had won a man who would never fail her — a tower of strength — even though the tower threw rather a heavy shadow. Her own nature was subdued to what it had to work in; she wandered far from herself under these excitations. She was, indeed, so little herself that she did not want to be herself any more. But that ambition could not last. She felt herself moving sometimes — the love of laughter and pleasure, the need for stimulus, the cry for something to anticipate with joy. There was no room for these delights, at any rate at present, in the purview of Kellock.

He continued solemn and staid, patient and wise, sometimes quite inscrutable. He was magnificent, but not life — as Medora saw life. Living with Jordan almost suggested living in church; and church never had been Medora's life, but rather an occasional interlude, depending for its charm on the clothes she was wearing at the time. She became a good deal depressed at this season and wept many secret tears.

Then a little relaxation offered of the mildest. Mrs. Trivett was able to report that Mary Dolbear and her husband had forgiven Medora, and she and Kellock were invited to tea at Priory Farm.

He agreed to go and assured her that here promised the beginning of better times.

"The people are coming to see the light of truth," he said. "You can always count on the natural good feeling of your fellow creatures, Medora, if you'll only be patient with them and give them time."

They arrived upon a Sunday afternoon in Spring and Jordan improved the occasion as they walked through the green lanes.

"The Spring teaches us that nothing is an end to itself, but everything a beginning to something else," he said. "You realise that more in the Spring than the Summer, or Winter, and yet it's just as true all the year round."

"I'm sure it is," said Medora.

"And so with our present situation. It's not complete in itself."

"Good Lord, no; I hope not."

"But just a becoming."

"It's becoming unbearable if you ask me."

"No; we can stand it, because our position is impregnable. We can afford to be patient; that's the fine thing about rectitude: it can always be patient. Wrong-doing can't. Perhaps he's spoken to your mother on the subject. If he has not, then I shall feel it will soon be my duty to see him again, Medora."

She was silent and presently, as they topped the hill and reached the Priory ruins in Tom Dolbear's orchard, Jordan spoke again.

"That crowing cock reminds me of something I thought on in the night," he said; and Medora, glad that the ruin had not put him in recollection of the last time they were there, expressed interest.

"You think a lot at night, I know," she said.

"It was a bird in the inn yard crowing, and I thought how wise men are like the cock and crow in the night of ignorance to waken up humanity. But nobody likes to be woke up, and so they only get a frosty greeting and we tell them to be quiet, so that we may sleep again."

"A very true thought, I'm sure," she answered, smothering a yawn. Then, as they entered the orchard by a side gate, a child or two ran to meet Medora. At tea Mrs. Dolbear expressed tolerant opinions.

"I judge nobody," she said. "More does my husband. I only hope you'll soon put it right, so as not to give evil-disposed people the power to scoff. However, of course, that's not in your power. Ned Dingle will suit his own convenience no doubt, and you must try and bear it best way you can."

"There's no difficulty as to that," declared Medora, "knowing we're in the right."

"You bluffed it through very well by all accounts," said Tom Dolbear; "but you can't defy the laws of marriage and expect the people as a whole to feel the same to you. However, you'll live it down no doubt."

Medora asked her mother whether Ned had taken further steps and Lydia did not know.

"Not to my knowledge," she said. "He's not one to do anything he'll regret. He's thinking of damages against Mr. Kellock, and I believe his lawyer's of the same mind."

"Is he going to leave here?"

"When he's suited. Not sooner, I think."

"Knox is after his house, I hear, and has got the first refusal for it," said Tom Dolbear. "There's a man in a hundred — Knox, I mean. That's what I call a philosopher sort of man — looks ahead and sees the future's only an echo of the past. So nothing he hears surprises him. We are very much alike in our opinions. What he wants with a house I don't know, however. He may think to marry again, which would account for it."

"I should hope Mr. Dingle would be gone pretty soon," said Kellock. "It's a bit callous him stopping, I think, things being as they are. It would be better for all parties if he went off in a dignified way, before the decree is pronounced."

"I dare say he thought it was a bit callous when you bolted with his wife," answered Mrs. Dolbear. "Least said soonest mended, if you ask me, young man."

Whereupon Medora, who was nursing the new baby, hated it suddenly and handed it back to its mother.

"If you're going to talk like that, Aunt Polly," she said, "it wasn't much good us coming."

"Yes, it was," returned Mrs. Dolbear, "if only to hear sense. You must be large-minded, or else you're lost, and instead of quarrelling with everybody who thinks you've done wrong, which will take you all your time, Medora, better be sensible and sing small and tread on nobody's corns more than you can help. We've forgiven you for your dear mother's sake, and when you're married to Mr. Kellock, you will be welcome here and treated without any thought of the past. And so will he; and if that isn't Christianity made alive, I should like to know what is."

Mrs. Dolbear was so pleased with her own charity that neither Medora nor Jordan had the heart to argue about it. Indeed argument would have been wasted on Mary's intelligence. She made Medora nurse the new baby again, and consideration of the infant occupied her.

"After your mother she has been called," said Mrs. Dolbear, "and her name's the brightest thing about her so

far. She's healthy and seems to have a live and let live sort of nature."

"She's got lovely blue eyes," said Medora.

"They'll fade, however," explained her aunt. "Most of my children have blue eyes to start with, but it ain't a fast colour and can't stand the light. If you look at my husband's eyes, you'll see they be a very pale, washed-out blue; and the children mostly take after him."

Lydia, her daughter and Mr. Kellock presently went for a walk before supper. As a treat, Billy, Milly, Clara and Jenny Dolbear accompanied them, and Tom himself started with the party. But he disappeared at the "Man and Gun," and they proceeded alone to the churchyard, that Lydia might put some flowers on a new-made grave.

The evening light brought out detail in the great grey tower above them. Seed of fern had found the ledges and run little lines of dim green along them. Over the battlements a white image of a cock hung for weather-vane. The churchyard extended so that the evening sun flung the shadows of the gravestones upon neighbour mounds, and Mrs. Trivett pointed this out.

"All his life long Noah Peeke darkened his daughter's life," she said, "and now you see his slate flings a shadow on her grave, poor woman."

She put her nose-gay on the raw-grass-clods built up over the sleeping place of Miss Peeke, and removed some dead flowers. Then they climbed the hill and extended their ramble with the children running on before.

"My friend, Nancy Peeke, was father-ridden," explained Lydia. "She sacrificed herself to her widowed father, and though a good few offered for her, she never left him. He reigned over her like a proper tyrant, but he never saw what he was doing and wasn't grateful to the day she closed her eyes. By that time it was too late to do much herself; and he ruled from the grave you may say, because up to her last illness, what her father would have done was always the ruling passion in her. It worked un-

consciously; but it worked. He ruined her life so far as we can say it. However, she's at peace now. Death's only a King of Terrors to the living. He can't fright her no more — nor her father can't neither."

"Take care people don't say the same of you," warned Medora. "You're Aunt Polly's drudge at present, and many people know it quite well and think it a shameful thing at your age — nobody more than Mr. Knox; and when Jordan understands about it, he'll protest as much as I do."

But Mrs. Trivett never allowed conversation personal to herself if she could prevent it.

Now she challenged Kellock, who had been very silent, and made him talk.

CHAPTER XX

PHILANDER'S FATE

MEDORA's mother found increasing matter for agitation in the attitude of Ned Dingle. She had seen him twice and urged the need of action. She had even offered to give him all her small savings towards the legal cost of the operation. And then he had startled and shocked her a good deal by two statements, neither of which Lydia had expected.

"All in good time," he had said. "I don't feel any particular call to hurry myself on their account. Plenty of time when I've settled my new job. As to the cost, it would be particular hard if you, of all people, was called to part on such a subject, and I wouldn't allow it for a moment. But when I do start on to it, my lawyer thinks I can bring a pretty hot case against Kellock for damages; so I dare say I shall knock expenses out of him, and a bit over. And the harder his savings are hit, the better every right thinking person will be pleased."

So he had spoken, and two days later had disappeared from Ashprington, and left no direction behind him. Where he was gone and whether he would return, none knew. Kellock deplored the delay and Medora bitterly resented it. She was very unhappy and her troubles now occupied her mother's mind. Mrs. Trivett felt chiefly concerned to approach Ned Dingle again.

"If he's down Ivybridge way, at the paper mills there, I might go and see him," she said to Philander Knox in the luncheon hour; but Mr. Knox either could not or would not assist Lydia to find her son-in-law.

"I don't know where he's gone," he answered, "and I

shouldn't worry in that matter, because you can't alter it, or turn Ned Dingle from his plans, whatever they may be. On the whole, I should back him to do the fair thing in his own time. You can't expect him to go out of his way for them."

"He wants to punish them seemingly," said Lydia. "He told me the harder Kellock was hit, the better people would be pleased. In fact he's getting a bit of his own back, I suppose, or thinks he is."

"In this case, it's all or none," answered Mr. Knox. "He can't get a bit of his own back, and he can't call it his own if it's ceased to be his own. The subject's wrapped in mystery, Lydia Trivett, and only time will hatch what's really in Ned's mind."

"He oughtn't to keep them on tenterhooks like this," she said; but Philander felt no call to criticise Mr. Dingle.

"He'll suit himself, and why not? I've given him a bit of useful advice. Whether he'll take it or not I can't of course, say; but don't you fret, that's all. Medora's broke up a bit, I fancy. She's just beginning to see in a dim sort of way she's not everybody. Being your daughter, I'm willing to offer friendship; but if she's going to thrust me out of your thoughts, then she'll have one more enemy than she's got at present, I warn you of that."

"You mustn't talk so, my dear man, if you please," said Mrs. Trivett. "My daughter's affairs and your affairs are two different things, and you needn't fear I'm forgetting all you've told me. You must let me have the full fortnight I bargained for last week. But you're on my mind too—working underground like a mole—and though I may not exactly see you at it, there's the marks of you. In fact I do think of you a lot, and if it's any comfort to you, I've dreamed of you once or twice."

"In a friendly way, I hope?"

"Quite friendly. We was shopping in a great shop, and I was carrying a lot of parcels."

"I don't believe in dreams," he said. "Give me real-

ity, and make up your mind. Above all things don't be influenced against me by — well, you know. That's where the danger lies, in my opinion, and you'll be going under your character if you let sentiment and silliness and a barrow-load of other people's children come between you and your duty to yourself — not to mention me. Because I warn you, Lydia, that the grand mistake you make is that you forget your duty to yourself. A lot of good Christians do that; though your duty to yourself is quite as much a part of righteousness as your duty to your neighbour. We're told to love our neighbour as ourselves, I believe, not better. And there's another side; by doing that woman's work, and coming between her and the lawful consequences of that litter of children, you're not doing her any good, but harm. You're ruining her character, and helping her to live a lazy life. You've taught her and your brother to take you as an every-day creature, and all as much in the course of nature as their daily bread, whereas the truth is that you are that rare thing, an angel in the house, and your qualities are clean hidden from their stupid eyes. It's making a couple naturally selfish, ten times more so; and that's what you unselfish people bring about so often as not. You toil and moil and work your fingers to the bone doing your duty, as you think, when half the time you're only doing somebody else's duty. And what's the result? You're not even respected for it. You're taken for granted — that's all the reward you get — you're taken for granted — never a nice thing at best. And I tell you that you're up against justice to me and yourself, Lydia. For though we've not known each other a year yet, there's that in our natures that belongs to each other. It would be a very proper thing to happen, and we should be teaching your brother's family a very simple but valuable lesson, which is that to have anything for nothing in this world is robbery."

"All as true as true," she answered. "I never find myself questioning your sense, and I quite admit there's often

nobody so properly selfish as your unselfish sort. I've seen them play the mischief with other people's lives, and create a very mistaken state of security in other people's houses."

"Once grasp that, and I shall live in hope," said Philander. "Let each man do his own work is a very good rule, because if you're always helping others, there's a tidy chance your own job's not being properly done; and though you might argue that your own work here isn't hurt by what you do at Priory Farm, it's quite possible that other work is hurt. I mean the time for thought and self-improvement, and — in fact, me. For I've a fair call upon your time under the present conditions, and though it's all right for Mrs. Dolbear to know you're putting years on to your life before you've lived them, it isn't all right for your true friends to hear about; and it isn't all right for your Maker, Who certainly never intended you for a nurse-maid at fifty odd years of age — or for a rag-sorter, either. You're ripe for higher things, and there's independence and peace waiting for you."

"I'm going to think of it," said Lydia. "For many reasons I'd like it, Philander Knox. You suit me very well, because you've got sense and character, and we seem to think alike in a lot that matters. You've made me fond of you, and I trust you. In fact, there's such a lot that looks promising about it, that, for that reason, one can't help mistrusting it. Life teaches anybody to doubt the bright side of a thing till you've weighed it fairly against the dark side."

"This hasn't got no dark side," he declared; "and if you're honest, the longer you look at it, the brighter it will shine. So be fair to us both. Trust your own brain-power; I can't give you better advice than that."

She promised, and that evening, though she had hardly meant to be so prompt, Lydia raised the question among her relations. Accident led to this, and threw so forcible a commentary on the conversation with Mr. Knox, that the

matter sprang to her lips unsummoned, and surprised herself. Yet voiced in the kitchen of Priory Farm, from behind a pile of the children's mending, Lydia's tremendous statement struck even herself as almost impossibly shocking and heartless.

Jenny had just suffered from an attack of croup and Lydia, of course, took the sick child into her own room, as Tom Dolbear would not let Mary do so.

"I must have my night's rest, or else I can't do my day's work," he said, and his wife agreed with him.

"I know Lydia will take Jenny, won't you, dear Lydia? Jenny's that fond of you, too. And there's no peace for me and Tom like the peace when the childer are along with you. Because then we know they're put first."

This evening Jenny would not go to sleep and Lydia had run up and down stairs once or twice. Then she went into a room where Milly and Clara slept — to find them also awake and clamouring for biscuits. Having fed and silenced them, she returned to the pile of mending.

It was a rough, wet night and Mr. Dolbear sat and smoked by the fire, while his wife drowsed on the other side of the hearth. The last baby was asleep in its cradle near her.

Tom told of a successful stroke at Totnes market and was pleased with himself.

"The year's begun well," he said. "I ain't one to count my chickens before they're hatched, but I never had such lambs in my life and the quality's as high as the numbers."

"And no more than you deserve," said his wife; "rewards come where they are due, and such a man as you did ought to be looked after. Oh, dear — there's Jenny again, I'm afraid, Lydia."

Mrs. Trivett departed a third time and presently returned.

"A little bit of temper, I'm afraid. She's crying out for an orange to suck, and that's the last thing she can have."

"I wouldn't call it temper," argued Jenny's mother. "No child of mine have got what you'd call temper, Lydia."

"That's where we don't agree then," answered her sister-in-law. "I'm fond of Jenny, as you well know; but what she's got to fight against is temper, in my opinion. We mustn't spoil her."

"If that happens, it won't be me, nor yet her father that does the harm," declared Mary placidly. "Where children come, you'll generally find that wisdom is sent to manage them, and I do think that Tom and me know something about how to manage our own."

"It's so long ago since you had your daughter to bring up, that very like you've forgotten the early stages, Lydia," suggested Tom.

"And in any case, though God knows I'd never have whispered it to you if you hadn't said Jenny suffered from temper — in any case, when you look at Medora, you can't be none too sure your way of upbringing was the best," murmured Mrs. Dolbear.

Mrs. Trivett smiled to herself and threaded another needle. She knew Mary very well and was not in the least concerned for this little flash. It meant nothing whatever. Mary was a worm who only wriggled if one of her progeny was trodden on. There was another shout from Jenny and Lydia took no notice, while both Tom and Mary looked at her inquiringly.

Then she spoke.

"I never like to trouble you people about my own affairs, because, naturally, you've got no time to think about a humble person like me."

"Don't say that, Lydia," said her brother. "Ain't you one of us and ain't our good your good?"

"Yes; but it's borne in on me, Tom, we can't live for other people. I've got my own life to live too. I've got my work, and I earn my living just as much as you do."

"Meanwhile that sick child's yowling her head off," said Mary sadly.

"She said she hated me last time I went up, so I can't go up again," declared Mrs. Trivett, "not till she's asleep."

"A child's a child," replied the mother, "and if you're going to take that line about 'em —"

She rose ponderously and lumbered from the room.

"You've hurt her feelings," grumbled Tom. "What's the matter with you this evening, Lydia? If anybody's vexed you, best to have it out and not sulk over it."

"Funny I should be in hot water with you and Polly to-night," answered Mrs. Trivett. "But you ought to choose your words cleverer, Tom. I don't sulk, my dear, whatever my faults."

"I stand corrected," answered Mr. Dolbear instantly. "God knows I've no wish to quarrel with you, Lydia — no, nor would Polly. We've got a great respect for you. As for our children — but you know what you are to them. And we feel that nothing's too good for you; and if I could afford to let you live here without paying your seven and six-pence a week, I'd thankfully let you — thankfully. But with such a family as mine —"

"For some things, however, if you had a paid woman to look after the children, it might suit their mother better. She'd feel freer to speak her mind."

"Certainly not," he answered. "We don't want no hirelings about the children — not while we've got you. We couldn't trust anybody like we trust you; and Polly would never be the same woman, or get her needful share of rest and peace with a lesser than you. And some day, I hope to make you free of everything, and not let any money question arise between us."

"I'm not worrying about my keep, Tom. Whatever else he may be, Jordan Kellock has got a very good respect of me, and though I shall never like him as well as Ned, yet he's an honourable, upright man according to his lights

and I can trust him. Indeed he's gone so far as to say he'd like me to lead a different life; for he's the same as Dingle there: he doesn't think it's a very wise thing for an elderly woman to be quite so busy as I am."

"Like his damned impertinence! And what does he mean by that, Priory Farm, or the Mill?"

Mrs. Dolbear returned at this moment; she was fretful.

"I don't know whatever you've done to Jenny. A proper tantarra the poor maid's in."

"I told her she couldn't have another orange to-night, that's all."

"Listen to this!" burst out Tom. "That blasted Kellock has been saying Lydia's over-worked!"

"Who by?" asked his wife.

"That's just what I want to know."

"If he means the Mill, he's right, I believe," continued Mary. "I've often wished she'd see her way to give up that troublesome work in the rag house and stop here with us, in comfort and ease, with our little ones to play with her."

"Or I might marry again and have a home of my own," suggested Lydia. "I'm the independent sort, Mary, and I often think it would be wiser to do that than stop along with you as a lodger."

There was a moment of silence, then Mr. Dolbear flung his clay pipe upon the hearth with such fury that it splintered into a thousand fragments.

"What in hell's happened to-day?" he almost shouted. "Here I come home with good news — great news, you may say — and instead of sharing our pleasure and being glad, for the children's sake if not for ours, that I've had a stroke of luck, you do every damned thing you can think of to pour cold water on it!"

"My dear Tom, don't be a fool," answered Lydia calmly. "You and Polly are getting so wrapped up in number one, that you can't imagine anybody having any

interest or thought outside this house and the welfare of you and your children. But the world goes on outside Priory Farm, and I say again, it's come to be a question with me whether I'm doing the best I can do in the world by stopping here. A question of duty, mind. I may tell you both that some very straight things have been spoke to me of late, and I can't pretend they haven't got a lot of truth in 'em — perhaps more than the man who spoke them thought. For looking back, as I have a good bit since this business of Medora, I see only too bitter clear that it's possible to be too unselfish and to spoil young folk and unfit them for the battle of life by coming between them and their duty. That's what I did with Medora, as you reminded me just now, Polly, and that's my inclination with your little ones; and I'm growing very doubtful if I'm not thinking of my own inclinations, or personal desires, more than what's right."

"Either you're mad, Lydia, or you've been talking to somebody that's mad," declared Tom furiously. "This is about the most shattering speech I've ever heard from you, and for cruelty and unreason I never heard the like. Look at my wife — ain't that enough? If she'd seen a spectrum, she couldn't have gone whiter in the gills — and her chin's dropped and all her teeth showing. And if such a shock ain't enough to turn her milk sour and poison that baby, then I'm a fool."

Indeed Mrs. Dolbear had changed colour and did look extremely frightened.

"I know what you're hinting at, Lydia," she said, "and I can only tell you if you was to do such a thing as to leave your brother at a time like this, after you'd practically promised to help me with his family — if you were to go on some selfish pretext and marry some creature and lose your comfortable home and your fame for sense — if you did that, you'd never have another peaceful moment from your conscience."

"And you'd never deserve to have one," added Tom.

"Looked at on high grounds, Lydia, it don't bear thinking on for a second, and well you know it. Bring your religion to bear on it, woman, and you'll feel a good pinch of shame, I shouldn't wonder."

"That's what I'm doing, if you could see it," answered Lydia. "It's only a matter for religion, so far, and the welfare of the young folk. I'm thinking for them and their characters. It would be a poor come-along-of-it, Tom, if years hence you and Polly was to turn round and say that I had marred your children's natures."

"We're the best judge of that," he answered. "And if we're satisfied with your way of handling the children, whose business is it to put all these wicked ideas in your head? God's truth! I never heard of such impudence. And you, at your age — as if you didn't know what was duty and what was not. Perhaps 'tis thought you spoil us as well as our children, and give everything and get nothing in exchange?"

He snorted with indignation when Lydia admitted that this was actually the case.

"Some do think so for that matter," she confessed.

Her brother honestly felt this to be an undeserved blow. He had built up a very different picture of Lydia's existence and believed that her privileges at Priory Farm at least balanced any advantages that accrued from her presence. This, however, was what Mary understood very much better than Tom. She dwelt under no delusion on the subject and fully appreciated the significance of her sister-in-law in the cosmic scheme.

"If that's the sort of thing outsiders say and you believe, then the sooner you're gone from my roof, the better pleased I shall be," shouted Mr. Dolbear. "I was under the impression that after your husband died, Lydia, you turned to me for comfort and put me first henceforth, and felt that this was a blessed haven for your middle age. But, of course, if I'm wrong and you're only a slave and I'm only a slave-driver, then —"

He stopped, for Mary did an uncommon thing and suddenly burst into an explosion of noisy tears.

"There!" said Mr. Dolbear tragically, "look at your work!"

"It ain't Lydia," wept the other, "it's you. I never was so cut to the heart in all my life, and I can't stand much more of it. Lydia's as much a part of this house as the door handles, and dearer to me, next to my children and you, than anything on God's earth; and when you talk of her going away from us, you might as well talk of cutting off my leg. We're three in one and one in three, you and Lydia and me, and the man or woman who came between us would be doing the devil's work and ought to be treated according."

"There's a heart!" said Mr. Dolbear. "If that ain't offering the other cheek, Lydia —"

"No," continued Mary, drying her eyes, "there's some sorrows I could face, if it was the will of God, but the sorrow of living my life without Lydia's wisdom and help, and the light of her countenance — I couldn't do it. I wouldn't be responsible. I know all she is in this house, and though you in your manly way — which is to be annoyed when you get a surprise you don't like — though you, Tom, may foolishly think Priory Farm could go on without Lydia, that only shows the gulf there's fixed between the male and female mind. I know Lydia's the lynch pin to our cart, and so do my girls, down to that innocent infant in the cradle, if she could talk; and so do Lydia herself, for though modest as a violet, she's far too witty to misunderstand a thing like that. And if I thought any evil influence was upon Lydia to make her restless, I'd go on my knees to God to touch her heart and keep it in the old pattern; and I'd stop on 'em till He had."

Here Mary wept again and Tom, impressed by so much emotion, moderated his warmth.

"If I said anything over and above, I'm sorry," he declared. "But when I get a shock, it nearly always

loosens my tongue; and to think that evil disposed persons have been poisoning Lydia's mind against her own is a bit beyond reason and justice."

"If we're falling short in our duty and undervaluing you, Lydia, you must tell us," added Mary, "for we're not the sort to fail in gratitude I should hope. We may not voice our thanks; but God knows if they're in our prayers or not."

Then Lydia spoke.

"It's nothing like that. It's only a natural difference of opinion. There's a man wants to marry me, and he can't be blamed, looking at me from his romantical point of view, for thinking he'd like to see me in my own home."

Heavy silence followed, and only a cricket behind the oven broke it.

Mrs. Dolbear's heart sank. She was prepared to go to any possible extremes of conduct rather than lose Lydia. Without Mrs. Trivett, her own life must inevitably become a far more complicated and strenuous matter than she desired.

"It's not for us to advise you," she said, "but I hope the Almighty will help you out of temptation, Lydia, for anything more dreadful and unbecoming than that couldn't happen to you."

"I dare say you're right, Mary."

"I don't tell you this for selfishness, nor yet because you'd leave a house of mourners and break a lot of young, innocent hearts, if you was to go. I tell you this, because I do believe your high nature wouldn't brook another man, or return into the wedded state with comfort after all these widowed years of freedom. I can't see you happy so; and I can't see any nice man wishing to take you out of this house."

Lydia rose to retire.

"As to that, Polly, it's all the point of view. Nobody can fairly quarrel with the man. He's all right."

"I'm sure I hope you don't think of it all the same,

after hearing my wife, Lydia," murmured Tom, now subdued.

"I must think of it. I owe it to him. I'm sorry you can't trust a woman of my age to behave sensibly; but I dare say that's natural. Only be sure I've no wish to give either of you a pang. You know what I think of you and the children, and how happy I've been to see them come into the world so full of promise and hope. And if you look back, Polly, you'll see I've always tried to be on the side of discipline and sense, and never lost a chance to strengthen your hand and win all proper obedience for you and Tom."

"We know all that," answered her brother. "You mustn't think because I'm a man of slow speech that my heart's slow likewise. Far from it. I like for everything to go smooth and peaceful; I hate change; and if changes are coming, all I can say is I haven't deserved 'em and more's my poor wife."

"Good night, Lydia. God bless you," said Mary, mopping her eyes. Then Mrs. Trivett left them and retired to the peace of her own sanctum. It was true that Jenny at present shared this ark, but Jenny had at last gone to sleep and Lydia meditated without interruption about her future.

She came to a preliminary conclusion that, for once, duty was not directly involved. It seemed at a first glance that her own inclination might reasonably be considered, and that no choice between right and wrong awaited her. To marry was a very reasonable step, whatever Mary might say, for she was not old, and Mr. Knox could be trusted to make a worthy spouse and treat her with all due respect and consideration. She liked him and felt it quite possible to share his life and devote herself to his comfort and welfare. But to refuse him would be no more difficult than to accept him. Her present life, that looked so grey seen from the outside, was agreeable enough to her.

She loved work and she loved children, especially her brother's children. She had been largely responsible for their up-bringing and they owed much to her. Moreover they loved her quite as much as their mother. Indeed she was the sun to their mother's moon, and she very well knew what a disaster her departure must be in the eyes of Milly and Bobby, Jenny and Clara.

Nor could she well see her own life separated from theirs. She had not decided when she went to sleep, but there was little doubt in her subconscious mind as to how she would decide. Mary's attitude had also influenced her. The real terror in Mary's eyes, when the threat of departure broke upon her, Lydia could not easily forget. She dwelt on these things and did not allow her sister-in-law's craft, or her brother's anger and selfishness to influence her.

As for Mr. and Mrs. Dolbear, they lay awake till dawn, racking their brains to devise means by which Lydia might be preserved alive to them.

"One thing's certain in my mind," said Tom. "We know the man; and that ought to be a tower of strength. There's no doubt it's Philander Knox, and all his sucking up to us and pretended friendship is now explained."

"We must get at him — for Lydia's sake," declared Mary. "She shan't be trapped to her doom by an unknown creature like that if I can prevent it."

"There's surely something beastly to the man," asserted Tom, "otherwise, after he'd once seen what my sister was in this house, he'd have understood it was a vain and selfish plot to try and get her out of it."

"She's always talking about the greatest good to the greatest number," added Mary, "and now 'tis for her to practise what she preaches. Here there's ten want her; and is one doubtful male, come from Lord knows where, to count against all her nearest and dearest? God forbid!"

"Well, I hope she'll see it like that; and if she don't, we must make it our business to queer that man's pitch. If

you and me, working heart and soul for our children and the family in general, can't get this foreigner on the run, we're not what I think we are."

Next morning Mary was far too indisposed to rise, and before she went to work, Lydia took her up a cup of tea and three slices of toast and butter.

"I've decided, Mary," she said, "and if it's any comfort to you to know it, I may tell you that I shall stop here."

Whereupon Mary wept again, held Mrs. Trivett's hand and kissed it.

"Blessed be your name," she gurgled, "and may God's reward meet the case, Lydia. I'd give you all the kingdoms of earth if they was mine."

CHAPTER XXI

THE PROTEST

At one end of the glazing house — a lofty and bright workroom at the top story of the Mill — stood the dry press, to which the choice papers demanding extra finish came after glazing. Here they were piled between heavy slabs of hot metal and subject to great pressure; but the primal business of glazing had already been done between metal rollers. A range of these presented the principal object in this workshop.

Girls prepared the paper for the rollers, and Medora had once been of this cheerful and busy throng. Hither came the paper from its final drying after the size bath, and the workers stood with a heap of sheets on one side of them and a little stack of polished zinc plates on the other. With her left hand each girl snatched a sheet of paper, with her right a plate of zinc; and then she inter-leaved the paper with the metal until a good wad rose in her crib. The paper was now ready for the glazing rollers, and men, who tended these massive machines, ran the sheets and zinc wads between the steel rollers, backward and forward twice and thrice under tremendous strain. Then what was dim and lustreless reappeared with a bright and shining surface, and the sheets returned again to the girls, who separated zinc and paper once more.

Mr. Pinhey had often preached on this text — indeed his simile was worn threadbare, though he repeated it to every new-comer in the glazing house and rolling room.

“With paper as with humans,” he would say, “nothing like a sharp pinch to bring out the polish; that is if a

man's built of stuff good enough to take a polish. Of course some are not; we know that only too well."

The distinctive sounds in this great shop were three and did he hear them, a paper maker with his eyes shut would know exactly where he was. First, the steady thud of the plates on the side of the wooden cribs; next, the ceaseless rustle and hiss of the paper flying between the girl's hands as it is laid upon the zinc or snatched off it; and lastly the rumble of the rolling machines sounding a bass as they grip the piles of paper and metal and squeeze them up and down.

The very precious papers went to the dry press; but the mass of them passed directly to the sorters, who graded all stock into three qualities — perfect, less perfect, and inferior. No inferior paper ever left Dene Mill. It was pulped again; but could not aspire to the highest standard having once sunk beneath it.

And lastly it came to Mr. Pinhey — the finisher — who seemed a figure conceived and planned for this lofty purpose. Spick and span in his snowy apron, with delicate hands and quick eyes behind their shining glasses, he moved spotless through the mountains and masses of the finished article; he passed amid the ordered blocks magisterially — a very spirit of purity who reigned over the reams and called them by their names. Wove and laid Imperial, Super-royal, Medium, Demy, Foolscap and Double Foolscap were all included. Here towered orange and old rose sections; here azure and ultramarine; here sea green, here opaline pink and every delicate shade of buff and cream, to the snowy whiteness of the great papers and mightiest sheets. From fairy note to "double elephant" ranged Mr. Pinhey's activity. He worked among the papers, great and small, and put the last touch of perfection and completeness before they passed away into the larger world.

But to-day Nicholas was concerned with a little affair outside the province of the finisher. On a sheet of palest

pink, a sheet that seemed actually itself to blush at the delicacy of its task, Mr. Pinhey had written a few sentences in his happiest manner and was handing it round the shop, that men and women might set their names thereto. He told everybody that he much disliked such an appeal and protest, but that his sense of propriety made it necessary, for conscience sake, to proceed. He was honest in this assurance and did not deceive himself. Some of his co-workers, who declined to sign, thought that Mr. Pinhey was conducting his cathartic mission from private motives, not of the highest, and frankly told him so; but they were wrong. The man steadfastly believed that religion demanded his action. He had debated the problem for many weeks and at last come to the conclusion that a strong step must be taken.

The fact that Jordan Kellock should continue to earn his living at Dene Mill, while he lived in sin out of it, had become a mental possession with Mr. Pinhey. He believed that such a situation must be an active challenge to Providence, a perpetual blister to the Everlasting Intelligence on Whose watchful keeping that human hive depended. It seemed to Nicholas that this negation of right could not go on for ever, and he presently convinced himself that what appeared to be nobody's business, was in reality everybody's business. He suspected that many of the more sober and God-fearing agreed with him, and he knew that, so far as the glazing house was concerned, the majority always agreed as a matter of course with his views. Only the irreligious or low-minded ever questioned him, and when they had committed that error, he did not rest until he had got them out of his department.

And now he had drafted an appeal to Mr. Trenchard and was procuring all possible signatures for it.

It began "We the undersigned," and it expressed a pious conviction that the presence of Jordan Kellock in the vat house was a source of danger to the prosperity of the Mill, and a threat to the spiritual stability of younger

people, who would see in his support and encouragement an indication that morals counted for less than professional ability and that skill and craft were rated higher than a right way of living and scrupulous obedience to Divine precept.

He was pleased with the composition, but took no credit to himself. He felt that his hand had been guided when he wrote it, and believed that every word was in the right place by a direct act of inspiration. And now he desired the largest number of signatures possible—from the heads of departments for choice. Unhappily there were strong forces opposed to Nicholas and he knew that not only would the foreman, Ernest Trood, refuse to sign, but he might influence others against so doing. Neither could Medora's mother be easily approached, though she had always represented a force for good. He decided, however, to invite Lydia's opinion. She could at least see the other side, and Mr. Pinhey felt that she would not misunderstand a man of his repute if he discussed the painful subject on the plane where he habitually moved. For he, too, very constantly spoke of "moving on a plane," even as the unregenerate Kellock was used to do. Indeed, they had no little in common—a fact that came to Mr. Pinhey's shocked ear on this identical day.

During the dinner hour, fountain-pen in hand, Nicholas proceeded upon his task, nerved thereto by most exalted sentiments. The certainties all signed with gusto; but among the doubtful attestors, Mr. Pinhey was disappointed to find few prepared to support him. Lydia he approached, where she sat reading a newspaper in her workroom. Indeed her thoughts were far from the printed page, but she opened it from force of habit until the work bell rang again.

"I'll thank you to read this, Mrs. Trivett," said Nicholas, as he presented his blushing manifesto. "You may for a moment doubt whether I ought to ask you, of all people, to sign it. I've been advised not. But we're old

friends, I believe, and I know you'll never quarrel with the man who does his duty, even if you don't see his duty with the same eyes as him."

"Duty's often a doubtful matter," she said, "and we mistake inclination for duty sometimes. You can easily hoodwink yourself about duty, Nicholas."

She read the protest and gave it back to him and shook her head.

"Do as you think right," she said. "But don't ask me to sign that. You'll guess without being told what a sad thing this is for a mother; but I'm not going to take sides this time of day. I've told them what I think about it and how I've suffered over it, and I've told other people also; but there's nothing gained that I can see by this. There's more in it than meets the eye, and Jordan Kellock is the sort of man to feel the punishment of his own conscience much sharper than the voice, or vote, of his fellow men."

"'Conscience!'" exclaimed Mr. Pinhey. "How can you say that the man who does a thing like that have got a conscience, Mrs. Trivett?"

"Because I know he has — so do you if you'll think. There's very few so fussy and nice about life and its duties and bearings as Jordan Kellock. We all know what he is; and until this happened, nobody respected him more than you. And now he's done a thing that your conscience and mine don't approve. But remember this, he'd never have done it if his own conscience hadn't supported him."

"It was the devil getting the better of his conscience," argued Nicholas. "He was always weak, because he was self-righteous, though Lord knows, seeing his foggy religious opinions, none had less reason to be. He had got his own theory of morals seemingly, and since it didn't come out of the Word, it was worthless as you'd expect. So when the trial came and your daughter —"

"Leave it, there's a good man. I'm not going to argue upon it. I hope they'll soon be properly married and this sad business allowed to pass by and be forgot. For the

minute it's up to Ned Dingle, and I've been bitter sorry for him, and he knows all I think about it; but there's no more can be done to right the wrong and ease people who feel like you, till Ned does it."

"Your heart is speaking against your morals, Lydia, if I may say so."

"You may say what you like, of course."

"You can't rise to the thought that it is painful for some of us to earn our living under the same roof as that man?"

"No," she said. "I've never met the man or woman so bad that I couldn't work under the same roof with them."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It's doubtfully Christian to be so large-minded in my opinion," he said. "Do the other women up here think the same?"

"Alice Barefoot will sign; but her brother, Henry, will not."

"Being an old sailor, no doubt he won't," said Mr. Pinhey. He won Miss Barefoot's support, however, and then skirmished in the neighbourhood of the vat house. Jordan was not there, and after Mr. Life had appended his signature and Harold Spry, Kellock's couther, had declined to do so, Nicholas approached Philander Knox.

"I don't know your exact opinions," he said; "but I should be glad if you can feel on this subject with most of us serious people. You know the facts and feel it oughtn't to go on, I expect — that is if you take life seriously, as no doubt you do."

"The thing is to take other people's lives seriously and your own pretty light," said Knox. "That's the best way, because it keeps your sense of proportion about fair, Pinhey."

Nicholas liked these problems, but was doubtful here.

"Do you mean as a matter of morals?" he asked.

"No — as a matter of business," replied Philander. "Because if you put yourself first always, your fellow

creatures will be mighty quick to put you second, or third, or out of the running altogether. Nobody bores people worse than the man who is always thinking about himself. But if you show a proper interest in others and their hopes and fears and likes and dislikes, then the better sort will gladly give as well as take. If you want anything for nothing in this world, you won't get it; but the more you give, the more you'll receive, in my experience. In the matter of giving don't stint and don't squander; and don't give where you'll get nothing back of course—that's foolish."

Mr. Pinhey shook his head.

"Worldly wise, not heavenly wise," he declared. "Be so good as to read this document, Knox, and let me have the pleasure of seeing you sign it. It's the elder people I want to do so. In fact I'm not showing it to the young ones. Better such things should not enter their innocent minds."

Mr. Knox read Kellock's indictment and grinned.

"What do you know of sin, you old caterpillar?" he asked very rudely. "Good powers, my man, d'you see what you're doing? You're shaving with a blunt razor over another chap's wounds. Blow out reason's candle if you like to walk without light; but don't from your darkness presume to show other people their road. That's damned impertinent and only makes the other sort cuss."

Mr. Pinhey shrank resentfully.

"If you make reason your guide," he said, "God help you, Philander Knox. And—"

"Tear it up—tear it up and save Trenchard the trouble, Pinhey. Be guided by a man who's moved in a larger world than yourself."

"A larger and a wicked world, if you can talk like that about sin," answered Nicholas, who had grown pinker than his paper.

"I'm not talking about sin. I'd as soon talk about sin to a bluebottle as you. You're one of the born good sort,

you are, and the funny thing is that you've worked in the same business with Kellock all these years and years and don't know he's the same order of creation as yourself. Why, my dear man, he might be your son!"

"This is too much and I won't stand it," answered Mr. Pinhey. "I ask you to recall that, Knox; or I won't know you from this hour forward."

"Don't be fussy. We're both well past our half century and can air our opinions without getting cross. I mean that Kellock is a serious-minded chap with a strong character and steadfast opinions. He's just as anxious to leave the world better than he found it as you are. And he means to do so; and very likely, if he's not too deadly in earnest and too narrow in his virtues, he may. You must grant him his good character, Pinhey, and then ask yourself whether a man with his past would have done this without what seemed good and high reasons. I'm not saying he was right for a minute; but I'm saying he weighed it in all its bearings and from his mistaken and inexperienced point of view made this big error."

"And aren't we here to show him his error?"

"No, we can't show it to him. You wouldn't convince him if you talked for a month from your point of view. Sit tight—that's all you've got to do. I believe he's made a big mistake and I believe he'll see it for himself before he's six months older. But let his own nature work and don't say more till you know more. What looks like wickedness to one man's eye may seem goodness to another man's."

Mr. Pinhey had now grown calm.

"Then I won't waste more of your time," he answered. "You speak, I suppose, what you believe according to reason; but I wouldn't say you were a very good advertisement even for reason, Knox. I know your eyes will be opened about that man sooner or later. I can only trust that he's one by himself. I stand on the old paths and I

believe most of us here do the same. But if we're going to set up Kellock and his ways as a model, then I don't see myself what's to become of civilisation, or religion either."

He departed, completed his rounds and confessed to disappointment at the result. Still he had mustered a respectable following and the document he left at Matthew Trenchard's private house that evening was signed by twenty-eight men and women in more or less responsible positions.

To his everlasting surprise and indignation, Mr. Pinhey never heard of the protest again. He might as well have dropped it into the Dart, or posted it on the west wind.

A week passed and nothing happened. Nicholas had met the master frequently and found him just as usual — cheery, practical, busy. He fumed in secret. He told Robert Life and old Mr. Amos Toft, who mixed the size, that were it not for the fact that he only wanted a year to qualify for his pension, he would resign.

Mrs. Trivett and Philander Knox discussed the matter on an occasion when they met at close of work. It was the day on which Lydia had to announce her decision with respect to her admirer, and they both knew the time had come.

"We'll give the Corkscrew a miss and go round the pond," he said. "You can't talk climbing that Jacob's ladder of a hill — at least I can't."

Her heart sank, for she had desired to make the painful interview as brief as possible. But the event proved that Lydia need not have feared, for Mr. Knox took her black news in an unexpected spirit.

They spoke first, however, of Medora and Jordan Kellock.

"I never heard the like," said Lydia. "It shows the danger of doing such things and not counting the cost. They was so wrapped up in their own affairs that they never saw it takes three people to make a divorce, and now

that injured man is opening their eyes. It's all as wrong as wrong can be, yet where are you going to put the blame?"

"I'm not going to put the blame anywhere," answered Mr. Knox. "There's a lot too much meddling, in my opinion, and if they're only left alone, those three people may work out their own salvation in their own way. I'm fed up with 'em: one would think the welfare of Dene hung on their capers. To hear old Pinhey, you'd say it depended on our opinion about 'em whether we'd ever get to heaven ourselves. Where you can't help, don't worrit. They're all right; but what about me? This is the appointed time, Lydia, and I hope I may add that this is the day of salvation."

She jumped at the suggestion to lighten her refusal.

"I expect you may; and you'll look back at this evening and feel you are better a free man. Yes, you must regard yourself as free, please — I couldn't do it — I couldn't take another. I'm fond of you, if that is anything, and I'm proud you could have a fancy for me; for a reminder that I'm a woman, coming from such a man as you, naturally makes me a bit above myself. But my life's run into a mould, you see. It's found its channel, like a river does; and it's made its bed. I say again I like you — I even love you, if the word ain't nonsense at fifty; but I've seen my duty clear since we spoke about it. I couldn't fairly leave my sister-in-law and brother. 'Twould be like taking a screw out of a machine. The screw ain't much in itself but a lot depends upon it."

"You won't marry me, you mean?"

"Won't ain't the word. I'd be very pleased to be your wife if I was a free party, but in a sense I'm not free. You can't be in two places at once, like a flash of lightning, and I can't keep house for you and look after Mary's family and do my bit at Priory Farm. And it amounts to this — my brother, when he heard what was afoot, made it very clear that Priory Farm simply couldn't get on with-

out me. That may seem a vain thing to you; but it's the truth — absurd, I dare say; but they're built like that. You, on the contrary, would get on without me well enough."

"Speak for yourself, but not for me," he said, "and not for your brother, Tom, and his mate. Rabbits in a hutch have got to be looked after, I grant, but you mustn't believe everything you hear — even from Tom Dolbear. Answer this: if you died to-morrow, what would happen at Priory Farm? Why, my dear woman, in six weeks they'd have somebody in your place who looked after the children all her time; and they'd wonder why they never thought of that before. We won't argue about it, however. When you say 'duty,' I'm dumb, of course. But tell me this before we drop the subject: would you marry me if things were otherwise and your sense of duty didn't come between?"

Mrs. Trivett was immensely relieved to find how quietly he had taken his reverse.

"Of course I would," she said. "You're one of the best, and if it hadn't been that I'd got to work out my life same as I'm doing, I'd have been glad enough to come to you. People at our time of day have got judgment, if ever they're going to have it, and in my opinion we should have made a well-matched pair enough. But such good things are not for me. I've been happily married once, and can't expect it again."

He continued to be quite restrained.

"I venture to think you're about as wrong as you can be, Lydia, and your usual good sense has gone astray. But I know duty's your guiding star, and I'm happy to think duty changes its shape from time to time, like most other human contrivances."

"I'll always try to do it, my dear man, however it looks."

"You will — that's why I'm keeping so quiet now, instead of breaking out and making a noise and lowering

myself in your opinion. The beauty of a woman like you is that you're steadfast—a slave, if not a martyr to what you think right. That being so, I take your word for the minute, and leave the rest to Providence."

She was puzzled, but very glad he could be so gentle with her.

"You've took it like the wise man you are," she said. "I might have known you would; but I was afraid you wouldn't."

"I haven't took it," he answered. "There are some things you don't take, and this is one of them. I've a great trust in the future, Lydia Trivett. The future, though it plays many people false, have always treated me in a very sportsmanlike and trustworthy manner so far."

"That's because you make your future just the same as you make your paper, and leave nothing to chance."

"You never spoke a truer word," he answered. "I'm not going to brag before the event; but if ever I was properly interested in a bit of my future, it's now; and if I can get the pattern right, and stamp my will and purpose upon it, I dare say you'll be a good bit surprised yet."

She became uneasy.

"Don't you meddle with fate, however. That's not our work," she said.

"And what would you be inclined to call 'fate'?" he asked.

"Well," she answered, "in a manner of speaking, you might call 'fate' my dear brother, Tom, and his wife. And I'll ask you not to touch them, Philander."

"I promise that. That wouldn't be playing the game," he admitted. "I'd be very sorry if they had anything to do with my future, Lydia. You might as well try to carve butter, or a turnip, into an enduring thing. I shall treat your brother and his wife the same as I've always treated them. For the present, we'll just go on as we're

going, please — good friends, and nothing more. I've a right to ask that."

"I wish you'd take 'no' for an answer, however."

"There's nothing final about anything in this world except death, my dear. While she's alive it's never too late for a woman to change her mind. And if you did, it would be very unfortunate if I was in such a position I couldn't listen to you. You may ask me to marry you, yet, Lydia — if Providence so wills it — though not leap year, I believe."

She laughed, and such was his amiability that he saw her all the way home.

CHAPTER XXII

A TEST FOR JORDAN KELLOCK

PHILANDER KNOX combined with his level temper and tolerant philosophy an element of shrewdness which those with whom his lot was now cast failed to appreciate. He was no intriguer for choice, nor might he be called inquisitive; but if the occasion demanded it and his own interests were involved, Philander found himself quite prepared to employ his latent gifts. He was cunning, with that peculiar sort of craft that often belongs to expansive and genial natures; he could, in fact, be exceedingly sly and even unscrupulous within certain limits. Now the need for active operations on his own behalf began to be obvious to Mr. Knox. Finding that she cared for him, he had not the smallest intention of losing Lydia. He felt her argument against matrimony beneath serious consideration; but he knew that to her the reasons for his rejection were grave and sufficient, and he did not propose any counter-attack on the front of his reverse.

He preferred a more circuitous response. He devoted a great deal of time to the subject and then took an occasion to see Medora. That he might do so, he would spend his leisure by the river and smoke his pipe there out of working hours. For some time he failed; but then came a day when he saw her returning to "The Waterman's Arms" from the village and greeted her.

Always glad to hear a kindly voice and aware that Knox had become a friend of her family, Medora smiled upon the vatman. He appeared gloomy, however, and their conversation began by his confessing his private tribulations.

"You've got a heart," he said, "and you are one of the

brave sort that stand up to life and go through with a thing like a good plucked one, even though you know you've made a mistake. Well, such show sympathy for their neighbours, Medora, so I'm sure you'll be sorry to hear I've had a great disappointment."

The other guessed what it was.

"Mother won't marry you!"

"So she says; but on a very poor excuse in my opinion. Such a sensible woman might have found a better reason for turning me down. In fact she would — if there'd been a better reason; but the truth is there's no reason at all. Therefore, though she thinks I'm rejected, I don't regard myself as in that position — not yet."

A love so venerable in her eyes did not interest Medora, but she mildly wondered at him.

"I'm sure I can't think how you old people can run after each other and drive each other miserable, when you see what a beastly mess we young people make of love," she said.

"Ah! You speak with a good deal of feeling. But we old people — as you call us, rather thoughtlessly, Medora — we old people don't take you children for a model. We've been through those stages, and what we understand by love ain't what you understand by it. We've forgotten more than you know. I should have thought now that Kellock — a man so much older than his years — might have given you a glimpse of the beauty and steadfastness of what we'll call middling to middle-aged love, Medora?"

"Perhaps he has."

"Don't his ideas appeal to you as a bit lofty and high class — as compared with your first's notion of it for instance?"

She looked sharply at Mr. Knox, but did not answer. He put the question moodily and appeared not interested in an answer. Indeed he proceeded without waiting for her to speak.

"There's two sorts of women, and you can divide them

like this — the sort of women men go to when they want to grumble about their wives, and the other sort. A man knows by instinct whether he'll get a tender hearing, or whether he won't."

"I didn't know decent men did grumble about their wives," said Medora.

"Didn't you? Oh, yes, they do — even the best, sometimes. If decent women can grumble about their husbands — you, for example — why shouldn't decent men?"

"I haven't got a husband at present," said Medora sharply, "so you needn't drag me in."

"The sensible way you look facts in the face is very much to be admired," he answered. "There's a lot of girls, if they'd done what you've done, would bury their heads in the sand, like the ostrich, and think it was all right. But you don't let the truth escape you. I admire you for that. In a way, it's true you haven't got a husband at present, but on the other hand, you have."

"I won't pretend; I never will pretend," she answered, pleased at his praise. "I do look things in the face, as you say, though nobody gives me credit for it, and I'm not going to call Mr. Kellock my husband till he is."

"I wasn't thinking so much about him as Mr. Dingle. You're that fearless that you won't be afraid of the fact that under the law he's your husband still, monstrous though it may sound."

Medora nodded. She did not resent the statement, but asked a curious question.

"How does he find himself?" she inquired, and it was Mr. Knox's turn to be surprised. But he showed no astonishment.

"To be plain, he's suffered a lot. I've got the pleasure of being his friend, because he knows I'm a man who keeps himself to himself, and doesn't push in where angels fear to tread. He's given me his confidence, and I find this has been a very cruel facer for Dingle — knocked him out altogether. He'll get over it some day, as a brave

man should. But he's got a warm heart, and he'll never be quite the same again — naturally."

"If he's suffered, so have I," said Medora, "and if you're in his confidence, I may tell you that I want all my pluck and a bit over sometimes. I knew more or less what I was going to face; but I didn't know all."

"No woman ever does know all when she takes over a man. It cuts both ways, however. Kellock didn't know all when he ran away with you."

"Know all! No, he don't know all. He don't know half what I thought he knew, and what I'd a right to think he knew."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Knox. "Don't he, Medora?"

"I'm speaking in confidence, I hope?"

"That be sure of. I'm old enough to be your father, and shall faithfully respect your secrets, just as I respect Mr. Kellock's, or Ned's, or anybody's."

"Sometimes I think my life's going to turn into one long Sunday now," she said.

"That's a good sign, because it shows you're grasping the stern truth; and it shows Jordan's breaking you in. Once you're broken in, Medora, you and him will come together in a real understanding spirit. No doubt the first stages are rather painful to a handsome, clever bit like you, with dashing ideas, and the memory of what life was with Ned; but only give Kellock time, and the past will grow dim, and you'll get used to the everlasting Sunday idea. I greatly admire Kellock, because he never changes. He'll be a bit monotonous at first compared with the past, but he'll wear. You'll feel you're always living in cold, bitter clear moonlight with Kellock; and I dare say you'll miss the sunshine a bit for ten years or so; but gradually you'll get chilled down to his way. And once you've settled to it, you'll hate the sunshine, and come to be just a wise, owl-eyed sort, same as him."

Medora could not conceal a shiver.

"You've voted for moonlight and cold water against sunshine and a glass of sparkling now and again — and, no doubt, you're right, Medora."

She turned on him passionately.

"Don't — don't, for God's sake!" she cried. "What d'you think I'm made of — ice?"

"Not yet. You can't change your happy nature all in a minute. It'll come over you gradual — like the salt over Lot's wife. You naturally want to know what Ned's going to do about it, and I've been at him on that score — because your mother's asked me to. She don't like the present doubt and delay, and so on. It's uncomfortable, and makes the unrighteous scoff."

"If he wants us to eat dirt —"

"No, no, nothing like that. Ned's a gentleman, but these things have shaken him. He'll make up his mind presently, but he wants to act for the best — for your sake. Not for Jordan's, but for yours. There's a lot goes to such a thing as you've done, and you want to be a student of character before you decide about it. Ned don't mean to let his feelings run away with him. He's got to think of your future."

"Then why has he sunk to damages against Mr. Kellock?"

"Don't believe anything you hear yet. I happen to know that Ned has not settled upon that question. He's very large-minded, as you'll remember."

"That would be the last straw, I should think."

"You can't fairly quarrel with him, even if he do shake a bit of cash out of your husband to be. I'm sure I should have. You may never know now all that you were to Ned; but I know, and he knows. He's been wonderful, in my opinion, and, with your great imagination, you ought to see how wonderful. If he didn't kill Kellock, why was it? Out of regard for himself? Not a chance! Ned's fearless, as the male should be, and would hang for Kellock to-morrow — especially seeing he's got no particular interest in going on living himself, owing to his

shattering loss. No, Medora; he didn't spare your future husband because he was frightened of letting daylight into him; he spared him because he knew you loved him better than anything on earth. You put that in your pipe and smoke it, my dear. And take heart from it also; for if Ned wouldn't sink to Kellock's life, you may bet your pretty shoes he wouldn't touch his money. Now I must get back."

"There's a lot more I'd like to say, however. When you do find a fellow creature that understands, which isn't often, your soul craves to speak," said Medora.

"Another time, perhaps. But mind this. Be fair. You're so brave, I see, that you can afford to be fair to all parties — friends and foes, so to call 'em. And you know a fine character when you see it, I'm sure," concluded Philander vaguely; then he sped away, leaving the girl anxious both to hear and tell more. She did not comprehend Mr. Knox in the least, but perceived he was friendly. There was, moreover, a human ring in his voice that heartened her, and she felt the contrast keenly when she returned to the level tones and unimpassioned serenity of Jordan Kellock.

But for once she did see Kellock taken out of himself, and in a frame of mind enthusiastic and excited.

There came that evening a man to visit him from Totnes. He was an earnest and serious-minded person, well known to Jordan, and in his leisure he did secretarial work for the local branch of the Independent Labour Party. Upon that organisation, in the opinion of Kellock, the hope and future prosperity of his class now hung. By its activities alone salvation might presently be welcomed. And now his friend, acting as mouth-piece of the party, invited Kellock to deliver a lecture at Totnes, on "Our Aims and Hopes." It was understood that county men of authority in the movement would be present, and Kellock did not need his fellow politician to point out that herein their side designed the young vatman an opportunity to show what he was good for.

"You'll jump at it, of course, and do your very best. It may be worth a lot to you if you get 'em. Lawson and Jenkins will be there from Plymouth, and very likely Sawdye, from Newton. I'll beat up the Totnes crowd. Give 'em an hour of your hottest stuff, and keep the shop-stewards to the front. We want to get a move on the unions all round. They're growing a bit mouldy in their ideas; but Labour can't stand still for them."

"The trades unions were made for Labour, not Labour for trades unions," declared Kellock.

"That's right; you rub that into them."

The young man stayed to supper, and he and Kellock soared to heights that Medora had not yet imagined. Jordan was full of life, and displayed a vivacity that he had never displayed in conversation on his private affairs. It was clear that nothing personal would ever light such fires. They were reserved for the cause and the cause alone.

When the man from Totnes had departed, Kellock addressed Medora.

"You may say that this is the biggest thing that has ever happened to me," he began. "I didn't expect it yet, and I must confess I'm a good bit gratified."

"So it seems," she said.

"Yes; because the people who are running our show in Devon are very jealous, naturally, that we shall give a good account of ourselves. There's a feeling in some quarters that nothing much in the way of fighting intellect comes from the West Country. Londoners and Northerners think it's a sort of Turkish bath all the time down here — a place for holidays and Devonshire cream and playing about. So if I'm to be reported, as I shall be, that means a pretty good advertisement and a pretty high compliment. It's come sooner than I expected, and I must rise to it, Medora."

"You ain't frightened to get up and talk to a crowd of men?"

"Not if I know I'm saying the right thing. I'd be frightened to do it if I wasn't dead sure I was right, and that my ideas — our ideas — will rule the world before I'm an old man; but they will. I must prepare my speech with my heart and soul. Everything must give way to it."

"Including me, I suppose?" she said.

"You're in what they call another category, Medora. You are part of my own life — personal to me as I'm personal to you and, of course, our private affairs mean a lot to us."

"I'm glad you think that."

"But this belongs to the world of ideas — to our souls and our highest ambitions — what we're born for, so to speak. I include you in it, Medora."

"You needn't then," she said, "because though it may appear a small thing to you, my highest ambition at present is to know when I shall be a married woman."

"Don't talk in that tone of voice," he said. "I feel all that, too, and you know I do, and I'm not going to sit down under it much longer; but that's in another category, as I tell you. It won't bring it any nearer talking. I'll see, or write, to Mr. Dingle before much longer, if he doesn't set to work; but in the meantime this affair will call for all my thought and attention out of business hours."

"Perhaps it would be a convenience to you if I went and lived somewhere else?"

His forehead wrinkled.

"When you say things like that, I never can be sure if you mean them for satire, or not," he answered. "If you're meaning it for satire, you're wrong, Medora, and I blame you; but if you really mean it, out of consideration to my time, then I can assure you there's no need for you to go. In fact, you'll type the lecture, I hope. It's going to be quite as much to you as to me, I'm sure."

"How can it be? You're so thick-skinned. What's

the good of lectures to a person who's living my life? You don't care. You've got your work and your ambitions, and you'll have the honour and glory, if there is any. But where do I come in? Who am I? What am I?"

"My future wife, I should think. You can't accuse me of anything wrong in that category, Medora."

"I'm not accusing you; I'm past all that. I'll try to copy you. I'll be patient. If you say you'll see Mr. Dingle, or write to him—"

"I shall see him. He's coming back, so I hear, to Ashprington."

Then he returned to his lecture, and, with the ardour of youth, did not sleep that night until he had roughed out a general plan and placed the heads of his composition clearly before him.

Long after Medora had gone to bed and the little inn was asleep, Jordan scribbled on, and surprised himself at the compass of his thoughts. He was amazed to hear the clock strike two, and put away his books and papers at once.

He could recollect no previous occasion in his life on which he had been awake at two o'clock in the morning. He fell asleep longing to read what he had written to Medora, for he felt dimly sometimes that he was more outside her life and its interests than he should be; and since he could never rejoice her on any material base of trivial pleasures, he must make good his claim by force of intellect and a future far above that which the average working man could promise.

But he also intended to bend the bow in reason, let life have its say, and their home its domestic happiness. He believed that, when they were married, they would soon become everything in the world to one another.

He went to sleep in a very happy, exalted frame of mind, and felt that life had taken an unexpected stride in the right direction.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WISDOM OF PHILANDER

WHEN Ned Dingle returned home, his future still unsettled, he had the privilege of an early visit from Mr. Knox.

They sat in Ned's small kitchen garden, and Philander advised him to plant his peas.

"Damn the peas," said Ned. "Listen to me. I was as good as booked at Ivybridge when I got your letter telling me to hang on. What's the good all the same? I don't know why for I should have listened to you, but I know you've got sense, and so I left it for the minute. I can't go back to Trenchard, if that's what you meant."

"I meant a lot of things," answered the elder. "I think so deuced highly of you, Dingle, that you've got on my mind more than any man ever did before, and I'm very wishful, for more reasons than one, to do you a turn. For the minute, however, it rests with you."

"I know it does. I'm fed up with hearing that. Well, I'm going on with it. I'm going to get the heaviest damages the law will give me out of that swine."

"Good — so far as it goes. And if things weren't exactly as they are, I should say ditto. But it's a very peculiar case, quite contrary to my experience, and it calls for a pinch of patience yet. Nobody has any right to dictate to you, because you're a man of good judgment, and I reckon you've done dead right so far, and kept your nerve better than I should, or many older men with less intellects; but don't you spoil the ship for a hap'p'oth of tar, Ned. It's paid you so mighty well to wait and hang off, that it may pay you better still to go on waiting."

"It only hurts her — it don't hurt him. They'll say I'm bullying a woman, next, and putting him in the right."

"Only the ignorant would talk like that. But I know your mother-in-law, and I also know Medora. The females of that family want very careful handling, Ned; and in confidence, I may tell you that Mrs. Trivett is being very carefully handled — by me. But Medora is not being carefully handled — quite the contrary. Kellock don't understand the female mind — how could he with a face like his?"

"What's that to me?"

"That's the question. Not that I want an answer. I'm only wishful to put certain facts before you."

"How did she ever think, in her silliest moments, that man would have any lasting use for her?"

"He got on her blind side, I suppose; for even a remarkable woman, like Medora, has her blind side. Who hasn't? But the interesting thing for you — and only for you — to consider, is that Medora sees straight again."

"That's her mother says that. I don't believe it. She's a lot too conceited to admit that she made an infernal fool of herself. She'd rather go miserable to her grave than give herself away."

"You naturally think so, having no idea what a power there is in the clash of opposite characters. Medora is proud, and has a right to be, because she is beautiful and very fine stuff, given the right nature to mould her. And she thought — mistaken girl — because you were easy and good tempered, and liked to see her happy, that you weren't strong enough. That's why, in a moment of youthful folly, she went over to Kellock, before she knew anything whatever about the man's true character. Now, of course, she finds her mistake. And don't think I'm getting this from Mrs. Trivett. One wouldn't take her opinion, being the girl's mother. No, I had it from Medora herself. I happened by chance to meet her, and

gave her 'good day,' for I don't make other people's quarrels mine; and we had a bit of a yarn; and I won't disguise from you, Ned, that I saw the punishment was fitting the crime all right. She's got a good brain, and every day that passes over her head is enlarging that brain. She'll be a valuable wife for somebody some day; but not for Kellock. She sees Kellock now in the cold light of truth. She don't run him down, or anything rude like that; but she just talks about him and his character like a sister might. My word, she's clever! She said that living with Kellock would be like living in moonlight. Did you ever hear a sharper thought? That just describes it. And where's the woman that wants to live in moonlight? You see, she knows. She didn't come to Kellock without experience of the other thing. After you, of course, a cold creature like him is like milk after treble X. I feel it myself. Not a word against Kellock, mind you — he was utterly misled, and came a cropper, too; but he's got the virtues of his failings, and being ice, he behaved as such, and has always treated her just the same as he'd have treated his maiden aunt — except he'd have kissed his aunt, but not Medora. So I put it before you, and leave you to turn over the peculiar circumstances, Ned. As I say, the punishment is going on very steady, and your tactics couldn't be beat in my judgment. They deserve to suffer; and she does; and if Kellock weren't so darned busy about what matters to him more, he'd be suffering too."

"He will, when I knock all his savings out of him."

"No, he won't — that would only hit her. He's got no use for money. He don't want more than the clothes he stands up in. But it ain't my business to bother you about what you're very well equal to manage yourself. I really came for quite a different reason, and that's the Mill. Bulstrode is going. He can't stick Ernest Trood, and Trood can't stick him. It happened yesterday, and in a month from now we must have a new beaterman.

You might not have heard that. Not that you'll come back, of course; but in your wanderings you may have heard of somebody?"

"No, I haven't. I must fix myself up now."

"It's a thousand pities things are as they are, but if I was you, I'd mark time a little longer, if you can afford to do so. And don't forget the peas. They ought to be in. You may not be here to eat them; but, on the other hand, you may."

"As to that, how about you?" asked Dingle.

"There again, I'm not in a position to close for the house yet."

"If she's said 'no,' she means 'no,' Knox. Mrs. Trivett don't change."

"More don't the weather-cock, Ned; but the wind does. It all comes back to patience, and, thank God, you and me are both patient and far-sighted men — else we shouldn't stand so firm on our feet as we do. Now I'll bid you good-night. And have a talk with Mr. Trenchard one day. There's wells of good sense in that man. The more I see of him, the more I find in him. He's got more brains in his little finger than we can boast of in our whole heads. And a warm heart also."

Philander withdrew, and went very thoughtfully homeward. He felt sure that Dingle would consider his remarks, and hesitated once or twice about returning and adding another touch; but he decided that nothing more need be said for the present.

On the following day, to her surprise, he sought Mrs. Trivett in the dinner hour.

"Fear nothing," he said, "and go on with your food. I haven't come to spoil it; but you know very well your good's mine, and it happens that I've got an idea."

"You're very kind," she answered. "I don't feel, however, I've any right to your ideas — not now. But you rise above a little thing like that, and you'll probably live to know I was right."

"It was the exception that proves the rule," declared Mr. Knox. "You're nearly always right, though in refusing me you were wrong. But let that pass. I'm considering your point of view. What's in my mind now is not you, but your daughter."

"I'm going to see her this evening. She's wrote me a letter asking me for God's sake to come and have a cup of tea. There's no doubt this waiting is getting on her nerves. It's very improper."

"You'll be surprised at what I'm going to say; but yesterday I had a remarkable conversation with your son-in-law. There's a lot more in that man than he gets credit for."

"He's behaved very well, I grant you — amazing well; but it's more than time he went on with it. He didn't ought to treat them like a cat treats a mouse."

"He's not that sort. He looks far beyond anything like that. He looks all round the subject in a way that surprised me. Have no fear he won't do right."

"It won't be right in my opinion to take damages out of Kellock — that's revenge."

"Well, he's only human. But what I'm coming to is this. Ned has got a very righteous down on Kellock, and feels no need to show mercy there, for Kellock showed him none; but he don't feel the same to Medora."

"Since when?" asked Mrs. Trivett. "He felt the same to her all right last time I saw him."

"But not now. His mind worked at Ivybridge, and he turned over the situation. And, in a word, if Kellock is going to save his skin and be let off, he'll have to thank Medora for it. I'm saying a delicate thing, of course, and to anybody less wise than you, I wouldn't say it, because I should be laughed at; but I do believe, if Medora could see Dingle while there's yet time, and afore he's loosed his lawyer, Kellock might escape damages. What do you think? Should you say Medora and Ned might speak?"

"Medora would speak to him if she thought she could serve Jordan Kellock, I dare say; but whether he'd listen I don't know."

"In my opinion, if Medora would speak, he'd listen. It ought, however, to be done by stealth. Neither one nor the other must know they're going to meet. Then it would surprise them both, and Medora might get round him."

"There's no danger in it for Medora, you reckon?"

"None; I've heard him on the subject. He may dress her down and tell her a bit of the truth about her conduct, and he may use some very harsh words to her; but more he would not do, and if she took it in a humble spirit, I dare say she'd come out top and get him to drop the damages when he divorces her."

Mrs. Trivett considered.

"I don't see any harm could come of it, even if no good did," she replied, after a pause. "I'll sound Medora. She'd be glad to do Kellock a turn, naturally."

"I hope she still feels confident about Kellock. I can't say she spoke with great warmth about the man last time I met her; but that was a passing cloud, I expect. He's going to give a lecture, and set the world right, at Totnes, presently, he tells me. I've promised to be there."

When some hours later, Mrs. Trivett started to take tea with her daughter, Medora met her by the river, and revealed a restless and melancholy mood.

Lydia sighed, and walked beside her.

"Well, what's the best news with you, my dear?" she asked.

"There's no best," she answered. "We're just waiting, and I'm ageing and growing into a fright before my time."

"The typewriter's come, Jordan tells me."

"Yes; it's come. I'm writing out his speech. But the minute I've made a clean sheet, he alters it all and messes it about. It's getting on his nerves, I believe, and I'll

swear it's getting on mine. I don't hear anything else, morning, noon, and night."

"It's distracting his mind."

"Yes; he can't think of more than one thing at a time, Jordan can't. I'm just a machine now, like the typewriter. I told him yesterday I didn't hold with some of his opinions about labour, and he couldn't have been more surprised if the typewriter had spoken to him."

"I shouldn't argue about his views if I was you, Medora. They're his life, in a manner of speaking."

"I shall argue about 'em if I choose. He'd think no better of me if I humbly said ditto to all he says. He goes a lot too far, and he'd take the shirts off the backs of the rich, if he could. He reads it over and over, and I very near stamp sometimes. Nothing will ever make me a socialist now. I dare say I might have been if he'd gone about it different; but now now. And, anyway, I'm not going to be the echo to Jordan, just because he takes it for granted I must be."

"He's found a house, he tells me."

"He has, but he wants to beat down the rent a bit. He's afraid of his life that Dingle's going to have his savings out of him."

"That's as may be. I dare say he'll do no such thing. It wouldn't be like Ned."

"Life's properly dreadful for me — that's all I know about it."

"I dare say it is. You've got to wait the will of other people now, Medora; and it's a thing you never much liked doing."

"But I'm not friendless — I'm not friendless," she said fiercely. "To hear Jordan talk, you'd think he's the only thing that stands between me and the streets; and I won't have it. People don't hate me — not all of them. But you'd imagine that, without Jordan, there'd be no place on earth for me now."

"I thought he was very gentle and proper in his treatment," said Mrs. Trivett.

"I can't explain. I only mean that he seems to think that if it wasn't for his watchful care, and coming between me and every wind that blows, I'd be torn to pieces by my fellow creatures. And what about him? If I did wrong, what about him?"

"It's rather late in the day to talk like that."

"I want him to see all the same that I'm not a lone, friendless, outcast creature, without anyone to care for me. I don't like to be championed by him, as if I was a fallen woman, and he was a saint. I won't have it, I tell you. I'm not a fallen woman any more than he's a fallen man, and I want him to know the world isn't against me any more than it's against him."

Lydia was surprised.

"This all seems silly nonsense to me," she said. "If you had anything to do, you'd not waste time worrying over things like that."

"You can't understand, mother. It's like being patronised in a sort of way, and Jordan shan't patronise me. At any rate, I want to come to Priory Farm for a bit — just to show him I'm not dependent on him, and have got a few good relations in the world. Surely, I might do that — just for a week or two — till he has got this blessed lecture off his mind? I know all he is, and I love the ground he walks on; but, along of one thing and another, he's not quite taking me in the right spirit for the moment, and I do think it would be a very wise thing if I was to come to you for a week or so. Please let me. They won't mind there. They'd do anything you wished. It would show Jordan in a ladylike way, without any unpleasantness, that I'm somebody still."

"Surely to God, you don't want to leave him?" asked Lydia.

"Leave him? No — I've had enough of leaving people."

He's everything to me, and I'd lay down my life for him, I'm sure; but just for the minute, even with him, I feel I've got to fight for myself a bit. It wouldn't be a bad thing for him to see what his life is without me. If I go, he'll miss me at every turn, and he'll think a bit more of me when I come back."

"But you say he thinks too much of you as it is, and fusses more than he need."

"He thinks too much and too little. I can't explain — there's no words to it. But let it go. I ask to come and spend a bit of time at Priory Farm. Surely you'll let me do that? I'm getting so thin and low that I believe I'll die if I've got to worry much longer. A week or two with you will set me up, and make me braver. My nerves are all on edge."

Medora was tearful and agitated. Probably her mother understood her better than she pretended. Kellock was not unctuous, but utterly humourless, and, in the matter of Medora, he did sometimes unconsciously take a line that suggested the stained-glass attitude. It was as much her fault as his, for, at an earlier stage in their companionship, she had never tired of telling him how she appreciated his sacrifices, his noble patience, and chivalric support of herself. A man without sense of proportion could not fail to be influenced by such assurances from the woman he loved.

"You shall come certainly," said Lydia, "and there's no need to take on and let things fret you to fiddlestrings. It'll happen right presently. It may be a good thing for you to stop at Cornworthy for a while."

She remembered Philander's suggestion that Medora might, with advantage, see Ned. It would be possible to arrange such a meeting at Cornworthy perhaps; and if Medora prevailed with Mr. Dingle to renounce his threat of claiming damages, that must be to the good.

She promised her daughter that she should come, drank

tea with her, and left her happier than she had been for a long time.

"It's not so much for myself as for Jordan," declared Medora. "It'll be good for him and open his eyes a bit to hear I'm going to Uncle and Aunt Dolbear on a visit. They forgave him and all that; but I don't think he knows they are friendly enough to have me at Priory Farm, and it will be right that he should know it. There's other reasons, too. If I can escape from going to his lecture, it will be a blessing. He'll make a rare fuss; but if I once get to Priory Farm, I can fall ill, or something to avoid it."

Lydia went home in a melancholy mood after this interview, and her daughter's unrest descended upon her.

She could not understand the relations between Kellock and Medora. They appeared to be extraordinary, as far as Medora was concerned, and the more Mrs. Trivett considered the various reports, the less able was she to put a cheerful interpretation upon them.

CHAPTER XXIV

NED AND MEDORA

WHEN Lydia asked that Medora might come to stop at the farm, Mary and Tom spoke simultaneously, for each hastened to be the first to accord permission.

They had suffered acute anxieties concerning Mrs. Trivett's possible departure, and when she told them that she had determined to remain, nothing was good enough for her.

In their joy and relief they grovelled before Lydia, heaped compliments upon her, and declared that never for a moment had they entertained the least doubt concerning her decision, even while, with every thankful word and exultant exclamation, they revealed the depth of their past anxiety and height of their vanished fear. She saw through it, and only left them uneasy in one particular.

Mr. Knox, so Lydia explained, had taken his disappointment in a spirit of great self-restraint, and behaved with such magnanimity and understanding that when he desired the continued friendship of Mrs. Trivett, she could not deny it.

"For that matter, I'm proud to have him for a friend," she said. "He's full of sense, and as he's prepared to offer friendship to me and mine, I'm prepared to accept it, and you mustn't mind if he comes to tea of a Sunday sometimes, and such like."

"He wouldn't allude to the past, or anything like that, I hope?" asked Mr. Dolbear doubtfully. "Because, in his rage at his loss, he might be tempted to give me and my wife the blame; and if he did that, I should round on him, and there'd be a scene."

"Fear nothing of the sort," replied his sister. "You may take it from me it won't happen. In fact, I went into it, and I've got his undertaking never to say one word to you or Polly on the subject. And he's a man you may say whose word is his bond."

"Then let him come," decided Tom. "If he's got that bee out of his bonnet, I don't want to quarrel with him. I never doubted his sense, save in that fatal matter."

"He's got a nice hand with the children, too," said Mary. "I will say that for him; and where a child of mine takes, you may generally trust the party."

In the matter of Medora, there was no difficulty; nor did Jordan make any. Medora, in fact, felt a shadow of disappointment that he agreed so willingly. It was only a lesser grievance than refusal had been.

She made a great business of her petition, but he made no business whatever of granting it.

"You've got the lecture through now," he said, "and there won't be no need for another copy yet, if at all, and you've heard me deliver it so often that I'll be glad for you to go and get a rest. Then you'll come back all the fresher to it, and to the actual night, when I give it at Totnes a fortnight hence. Go, by all means, and I'll come over to tea on Sunday."

So Medora, who would have wearied Heaven with her griefs, had he questioned the plan, now flushed that he approved it.

"One would think you was glad to get rid of me," she said.

"Who'd think so?" he asked. "It's a good idea, and will give you a bit of a rest."

"And you, too, perhaps?"

"I don't want a rest; but life's been getting on your nerves above a bit lately, and the calm of the farm and the fun of the children, and being with your mother, and so on—it's to the good, Medora. And soon, I hope, we'll know something definite, so that this suspense can

end. It's bad for you, and I should think the man was enough of a man to know he's doing a mean and cowardly thing to hang it up like this any longer. So you go, and rest quietly; and as I told you, if he doesn't proceed soon, I shall approach him again with an ultimatum."

"It's him that will have the ultimatum, I should think."

So Medora went to Priory Farm, and since she knew very well how to please her aunt, made a point of doing so. Indeed, Mrs. Dolbear considered she was much improved.

"I never thought she would rise to children," said Mary to her sister-in-law, "but of late, I may say, there's hope in that direction. She's more patient and quicker to see danger threatening a child. There was a time I wouldn't have trusted her too far with Milly or Bobby, let alone Jenny; but all that's altered. She may even be a good mother herself yet in fulness of time."

Indeed, Medora shone at the farm, and displayed consideration for other people that might hardly have been predicted even by the sanguine. Mary Dolbear was one who gave everybody ample opportunities to be unselfish, and Medora not only perceived these opportunities, but took them. She had changed, and none realised how much better than Lydia. But still the wisdom of any meeting between her daughter and Ned seemed doubtful. She hesitated to bring it about, and was still hesitating when chance accomplished it.

Medora had been at Cornworthy for ten days and once Jordan came to tea during that time. He was full of some alterations in his lecture, but brought no news of interest to his future wife.

Then she went for a walk by the ponds above the Mill, where emerald reflections of alder and willow and birch were washed over the silver surface of the little mere, and a great wealth of green leapt again above the mats and tussocks of the sedge and rush. Golden kingcups flashed along the shallows, and bluebells wove their light into the banks above the water.

Medora was actually engaged in the innocent business of picking flowers when she came plump upon Ned. They met at a narrow beach running into the lake under a limestone crag; and he, too, was there on pleasure, for he was fishing. Strangely enough, each was possessed with the same idea, and seemed to think it necessary to explain to the other the situation in which they stood revealed.

Ned scowled and started; Medora blushed. While he stared, she spoke, without any preliminaries and as though no terrific events separated them. It seemed as if the trivial accident of being there picking flowers demanded first consideration.

"You mustn't think I'm here for pleasure," she said. "I'm only killing time. We've got to wait your will, and I've got to go on living as best as I can. We're at your mercy."

He, too, fastened on the moment.

"As to that, same here. It's true I'm fishing, but only to kill time, same as you. I'm not in any mood for pleasure, I can tell you, woman."

"I dare say not," she answered. "People often fall back on little things when big things are hanging over them. I know how you feel, because I feel the same."

"You don't know how I feel," he answered. "And don't you dare to say you do, please. What do you know about feeling? You're the senseless rubbish that can hurt others, but you're not built to suffer yourself more than a stinging nettle."

She felt no pang of anger at his rough challenge. After Kellock's steadfast voice, the ferocious accents of Ned were rather agreeable than not. His tone for once was deep, as an angry bull. She liked it, and thought he looked exceedingly well.

"As long as he don't throw me in the water, I'll speak to him," thought Medora.

Ned expected a stinging reply to his preliminary chal-

lenge, but she did not answer it. Instead, she spoke of an utter triviality.

"What d'you think's in my mind — to show how little things get hold on you? The first thing that come in it when I saw you so close was pleasure, because I was wearing a pink sunbonnet — that being your favourite colour for me. But Mr. Kellock don't know what I wear."

He started with genuine astonishment.

"What in thunder be women made of? You can babble like that and pick flowers, and be a hen devil all the time?"

"If I am a hen devil, then I'm in the proper place for devils, and that's hell," she said. "D'you think a woman can't pick flowers and wear pink and yet be broken to pieces heart and soul?"

"So you ought to be. You was always playing at being a martyr, and now you damned well can be one. And I hope you are. The trouble with you was that I spoiled you and fooled you to the top of your bent, and let you bully-rag me, and never turned round and gave you a bit of the naked truth yourself."

"I know it," she said. "You were a great deal too fond of me for my good, Ned, and if you hadn't loved me so well, I dare say you'd have been a better husband."

"I couldn't have been a better husband," he answered, "and if you'd been made of decent stuff, you'd have known it. Not that I didn't see the ugly truth about you — I did; but I hoped and hoped that with time you'd get more sense, and so I held my tongue and held on."

"How I wish you'd told me my faults, Ned."

"You oughtn't to want telling. If you'd got any conscience, which you never had, you'd have seen your faults and suffered from 'em, as you ought. For one thing, you were greedy as the grave, and that envious that you didn't like anybody else to have anything you lacked. If you saw a worm on the ground, you wished you was a bird. 'Twas always so. Everybody else was better off than

you, and had got nicer cats and gardens and husbands and everything. A filthy jealousy it was that made you miserable, when you ought to have been happy, and tempted you off to try your luck with this thing, that's only a machine, not a man. Some chaps would have took you two and smashed your heads together like egg-shells, as you deserved; but I'm above anything like that. You thought I was a fool; but I wasn't such a fool as to do that. You wrecked me, but I wasn't going to wreck you."

"I've wrecked myself, more likely," said Medora.

"I don't know nothing about that. Whatever you get won't be half what you deserve."

Ned appeared to have changed for the better in Medora's eyes. The harsher were his words, the better she liked them. Here was real martyrdom. The emotion of this suffering became a luxury. She wept, but was not in the least unhappy.

"I've ruined two very fine men — that's what I've done," said Medora. She flung down her kingcups and bluebells, and sat on a stone and covered her face with her pocket-handkerchief.

He looked at her fiercely, and rated her from a savage heart.

"Crocodile tears! You never even cried like a decent woman, from your heart, because you haven't got a heart."

"Don't say that," she said. "Your heart can't break if you haven't got one, and mine's broken all right now. With all my dreadful faults, I'm human — only too much so. I know what I've done, and what I've lost."

"And what you've won, too — a lunatic, that will very likely end on the gallows as a traitor to the country, or some such thing."

"No, he won't," she replied. "He's too dull for that."

"You can call him dull, can you?"

"You've no right to make me talk about him," answered she; "all the same, honesty's no crime, and I say he's a dull man, because anybody with only one idea is dull."

"Yes, no doubt; if you're not his one idea yourself, you find him dull. And when you were my only idea, you still wanted more — always wanted more — more than you had of everything but trouble; and now you've brewed that for yourself. And what d'you mean, when you say you've ruined his life as well as mine?"

Medora enjoyed the lash of his scornful voice.

"You'll kill me if you speak so harsh," she said. "I meant — I meant — I don't know what I meant. Only it's clear to me that I shan't make him the wife he thinks I shall."

"That's true for once. You're no wife for any man. And as for him, he don't want a flesh and blood woman for his partner, and if you hadn't thrown yourself at his head, like a street-walker, he'd never have taken you. The shamelessness — the plotting — the lies. When you grasp hold of what you've done, you ought to want to drown yourself."

"I may do it sooner than you think for," she answered. "Rub it in — I deserve it; but don't fancy I'm not being paid worse coin than any word of yours. I'm only a woman — not much more than a girl, you may say; and I've done you bitter wrong, but there's always two sides to everything, and justice will be done to me — in fact, it's begun. You say Kellock never wanted a flesh and blood woman, and that's true — truer than you know. So you can see what my future's going to be. Once you're free, you can find a better and prettier and wiser creature than me to-morrow; but I'm done for to the end of my life. He's much too good for me — I know that — so were you — far too good; but there it is. I'm done for — down and out, as you would say. He'll go and live in a town presently. Think of me in a town!"

"Sorry for yourself always — and never for nobody else."

"I'm sorry for everybody that ever I was born. I don't want to bring any more trouble on people; and

very like, I may find the best way is to drop into the water some night, and let the river carry my poor dust out to sea."

"You haven't the pluck to do that," he said. "Anyway, you belong to him now, and have got to play the game and stick to him."

They argued for some time, the man minatory and harsh, the woman resigned. But once he amused her. Then Ned harked back to her threat.

"You talk of being down on your luck, and suicide, and all that twaddle. But you never looked better in your life. You're bursting with health."

"I'm not," she cried indignantly. "You've no right to say it. And if I am, what about you? You're a lot fatter and handsomer than ever you was in my time."

"That's a lie," he said, "and you needn't think I'm made of stone, though you are."

"If I'm a stone, 'tis a rolling one," she answered, "and that sort don't gather no moss. I'm glad I've met you, Ned, because I'm very wishful for you to know, for your peace of mind, I'm not happy — far, far from it. You deserve to know that. You made me laugh just now, I grant, and that's the first time I've laughed since I left you — God judge me, if it isn't. The very first time, and the sound was so strange that it made me jump."

"Laugh? You haven't got much to laugh at I should say."

"That's true. I'll never laugh no more. I wouldn't laugh when I might — now it's too late."

"It's never too late for anything for one of your sort. And when you say you're a rolling stone, I reckon you tell the truth for once. And things that roll go down hill, remember that. Hell knows where you'll roll to before you finish."

"It won't be your fault, Ned. You've got nothing to blame yourself with," she answered humbly, and he judged wrongly of what was in her mind.

"You'd better send Kellock along to me," he said. "The business is in hand, and I may tell you, I meant to hit him as hard as I knew how. But there's two sides to that, and in the long run what kept me from getting a gallows out of him is the same that's going to keep me from getting damages. And that's you."

"I'm not worthy to black your boots, Ned," declared Medora.

"No, and more's he — more's he; mind that. You thought he was the clever, strong man — the sort of man would be a tower of strength to any woman, and all the rest of it; and now you know, or you jolly soon will know, that he's only a tower of strength for himself — not for you. A man like him wants a woman to match him, and if you ask yourself if you match him, and answer yourself honest, if you can, then you'll answer that you don't and never will. You can send him to me at my convenience. He can call o' Monday at half-after eight — then I'll decide about it."

"Thank you, Ned. It's more than we deserve, I dare say. I don't care much what happens now if you can forgive me. I suppose you can't, but it would mean a lot to me if you could."

"You think I've got something to forgive, then? That's surprising. I thought 'twas all the other way."

"So did I," she answered, "but I know better now. I shouldn't be suffering like I am if I'd done right."

"You can do right and still suffer," he answered, "and now be off, and send the man to me."

Medora, again weeping freely, and leaving her bunch of flowers on the ground at his feet, departed without any more words. For once, her tears were real and her sorrows genuine. They were genuine, yet contained a measure of sweetness, and comforted her by their reality. This was an order of grief that she had not known. She persisted in it for a long time, after she had gone out of his sight, and found a sunny spot among the bluebells.

There she sat and heaped reproaches on her head; and self-blame was a sensation so novel that it soothed instead of crushed her. But this phase passed in contemplation of Ned. He had changed in some mysterious way. He was formidable, masculine — a thing infinitely superior to herself. Could she dare to say that Ned was now superior to Kellock? She fled from that thought as from chaos; but it pursued her; it made to itself feet and wings, and clung to her mind. She resisted, but it stuck like a burr. Ned was surely translated into something fine and admirable; while Kellock, now about to be a conqueror, had waned almost to a second-rate being in Medora's vision.

A sensation of physical sickness overtook her before this horrible discovery; for what could such a conclusion do but wreck her future utterly and hopelessly? If Kellock were to fall from his pedestal, who was left?

And a hundred yards off, still buried in the thoughts sprung from this remarkable conversation, Ned set up his rod, cast out ground bait, and began to fish for dace and perch. His mind, however, was far from his float, and presently his eyes followed Medora, as she moved pensively along the road on the other side of the pond. She would tell Kellock to come and see him, and then Ned would — he did not know what he would do.

His thoughts turned to Philander Knox and their last interview. Medora had said nothing to contradict the vatman's assurances. Indeed, she had implicitly supported them. And she was obviously changed. She had apparently enough proper feeling to be miserable; but whether that misery was pretended, or sprang from her conscience, or arose from her futile conjunction with Kellock under the present unsupportable conditions, Ned could not determine. He examined his own emotions respecting Medora, and found that she had slightly modified them. He despised her, and began even to pity her, since, on her own showing, she was having a bad time. But was she ever built to have a good time? Dingle doubted it.

CHAPTER XXV

THE EXPLANATION

AFTER the medley of emotions awakened by her meeting with her husband, no solid foundation remained to Medora's mind. Indeed, everything solid seemed to crumble before the apparition of Ned so close; before all the little familiar marks of him, his mannerisms, his vibrant voice, his virility, the flushing colour on his cheeks, the masculine sound and sight of him. Against that vision, which haunted her pillow at Priory Farm, arose the spectacle of Kellock — the difference between a stout, shadow-casting man and one himself a shadow. Kellock was a great hero still (she clave to that), but none the less he had become something spectral for her. Ned she knew — her recent meeting reminded her how well; but Kellock she did not know, and from that long night of thought there emerged one steadfast emotion: she began to cease to want to know. Perception of this startling indifference frightened Medora. It was half-past four o'clock in the morning, and an early thrush already sang when she made this discovery. She shivered at such a sentiment, set it down to hunger, and so arose and descended to the larder. She ate and slept, and in the morning told her mother of the talk with Dingle.

They walked together to Dene, and before Lydia went to the rag house, she had heard disquieting things. It was not the facts that concerned her, for they were to the good. That Ned wished to see Kellock and had determined not to claim damages, comforted Mrs. Trivett, for that argued an intention on Ned's part to be done

with the matter, and take such steps as should enable her daughter to marry at the earliest opportunity permitted by law; but it was Medora's attitude to Dingle that surprised her, and as she reached the Mill, she voiced her astonishment.

"You'll keep me 'mazed to my dying day, I reckon," she said. "My own daughter, and yet never, never do you do, or say, or look at things how I should expect."

"What's the matter now then?"

"It's right you should feel obliged to your late husband — I'm not wondering at that. But now — just because you talked to him, and he behaved like the man he is, and spoke sense and didn't break your neck, as some men might — just because of that, you seem to have turned round and — and — well, to hear you this morning one would think you and Ned —"

Medora quite understood.

"Funny you should say that. I know just what you mean. It came over me in the night. I got looking back a lot, and I couldn't help feeling, when he stood there talking to me in the old way — I couldn't help feeling that he'd got his side after all. I dare say I didn't quite understand his point of view, or how I looked from it. You've got to be fair, mother. It was as if all that fearful time, when we drifted apart, had been ruled out for the minute, and we were back at the starting place. I took all he said in a very proper and patient spirit; and if you ask him, he'll tell you I did. And he didn't mince words either. And I very much wish for you to see him as soon as you can, and tell him that I greatly value his advice, and that my eyes were opened for the first time to my fatal conduct. And, being a fair woman, I've got to admit that I used him badly, along of some weakness in myself I never knew was there; and I think he was more kind about it than I deserved. Please see he hears that."

"And what price, Jordan?" asked Mrs. Trivett.

"This has nothing to do with Jordan. I'm going to

see him now and explain that he must visit Ned at once; and I hope he'll feel properly grateful to Ned for his goodness to me. He ought."

Lydia's head swam.

"Don't you see, mother, that Ned is —?"

"I don't see nothing," answered Mrs. Trivett. "This is all beyond me. You're right to be obliged to him — well you may be; but, for God's sake, don't go blowing Ned's trumpet to your future husband, else —"

"I'm not going to be narrow-minded about Ned," answered Medora calmly. "You can leave it to me. I shall certainly tell Jordan the way I was treated."

As a matter of fact, Medora had quite forgotten the way she had been treated. For reasons far beyond her power to explain — since it was her quality to avoid directness at any cost — she ignored and put out of her mind the very harsh things Mr. Dingle had said. She banished them, and chose rather to dwell on what she regarded as the spirit and general essence created by their meeting. Detail might be dismissed, and it was very characteristic of Medora that when, presently, she met Jordan in the dinner hour, and took him up the valley, and rested her eyes on the spot beside the lake where she had listened to Mr. Dingle, she created a suggestion of that interview for the benefit of Kellock amazingly unlike the real thing.

The vatman ate his bread and cheese as he walked beside her and saw her on the way homeward to her own meal.

"When are you coming back?" he asked. "I've got the lecture dead right now, and I'd like to run it over once more. I've learned the typewriter myself too, and can give you a start and a beating at it."

"It's wonderful to me how you can fasten on a thing like that, while all my future hangs in the balance," she said. "I've got a bit of startling news, Jordan. I ran on top of Mr. Dingle yesterday. I was just picking a

bunch of flowers and wondering when something would happen when — there he was.”

“D’you mean he stopped you?”

“He did. I was shrinking past the man; but that wouldn’t do. He spoke, and I couldn’t believe my ears, for I’d got to think he was my black angel, naturally enough. But instead of anything like that, he let the dead past bury the past in a very gentlemanly manner.”

“Did he?”

“Yes, and I stood in a dream to hear his familiar voice, just friendly and kind.”

“‘Friendly and kind!’” exclaimed Kellock. “When was he ever friendly and kind to you?”

“Before — before we fell out. It was like going back to the old, old days, before he turned on me and drove me to you.”

“He’s learned his lesson then. That’s to the good. But what had he to say to you? It’s for us to talk to him now. And it’s for him to act, not to talk.”

“He knows all that. Anything like the reasonableness of the man you never heard. I couldn’t believe my ears. He’s not going to do anything wrong — far from it. He wants to see you on Monday evening at half-past eight, please.”

“Does he?”

“Yes. He’s turned it all over in his mind, and seen his mistakes and regrets the sad past.”

“How do you know he does?”

“He said so, and, with all his faults, he’s quite as truthful as you are, Jordan. And to show it, he’s not going to do anything about damages. He feels that wouldn’t be right. He’s a very just man. He didn’t only say things I was glad to hear either. He told me some bitter truths. He said that I’d never be the right wife for you, Jordan.”

“And you let him?”

“No, I didn’t. I wasn’t going to hear that, of course.

But he's got a brain — more than we thought — and he said that to a man of your disposition — but if I'm going to vex you, I'll leave that alone. Only don't think he spoke unkindly. And when you consider what it meant to him my leaving him —”

“What did he say about my disposition?” interrupted Kellock. “I've a right to know that before I see him, Medora.”

“He said that you've got a mind far above women — that a wife to you would be less than what a wife is to an ordinary man. Because you're all intellect and great thoughts for the welfare of everybody, so that the welfare of one, even your own wife, would be a small thing by comparison.”

“How little he knows!”

“So I told him.”

She proceeded and surprised Kellock further.

“D'you mean,” he asked presently, “that he could stop you in the open road and talk like this and say all these wise things, as if he was your brother? It's contrary to nature, and I don't understand it.”

“More did I,” she answered. “I felt in a dream about it. He might have been a brother. That's the very word. And last night, as I lay and thought, it came into my head in a very curious way that between you and him as things are, I've got two brothers and no husband at all. And God knows, Jordan, if it wouldn't be better to leave it at that, and let me go free. For if I could win the respect of two such men as you and him by stopping as I am and being wife of neither, it might turn out a lot better for all three of us.”

He stared in deep amazement. He flung away the remains of his meal and stood still with his mouth open.

“Are all women like you?” he said. “Upon my soul, I wonder sometimes — but this — it's all so unlike what goes on in a man's mind — where are we? Where are we? You always seem to leave me guessing.”

"I don't suppose I can make you see, dear Jordan. I've had hours and hours to think about it. You come to it fresh. Of course, it sounds strange to you for the minute. You must allow for the surprise. I'm only a woman, and, what with one thing and another, I've been that driven and harried lately that my mind is all in a whirl. It'll come right no doubt. He's not going to claim damages. That's one certainty, and that ought to comfort you. And I think when you see him, at his orders —"

" 'His orders' ? "

"Well, my dear man, do be reasonable. You jump down my throat so! It's no good questioning every word I say. It makes me despair. I haven't got your flow of language, and if I can't pick my words, you needn't quarrel about them."

"I'm not picking a quarrel, Medora; I'm only saying there's no question of his orders. I'll see him certainly."

"And thank him, I should hope. I dare say he'd have had a lot of money out of you."

"As to thanking him — however, it's no good arguing. Leave that for the present. You can trust me to take the right line with Mr. Dingle. When are you coming back? They're going to meet me about the house if I can take it for three years."

"Three years is a long time, Jordan. You might want to go to London before that. I dare say your lecture will get you into notice."

His eye brightened. Here at last was solid ground.

"You'll be back at the inn before then. There's a pretty good lot coming. I rather want to rehearse it to you and a man or two from the Mill one evening."

"I'll come back, of course, the minute I can; but — I want to tell you, Jordan, I'm not coming to the lecture. I've got my reasons."

Again he was left without foothold.

"Not coming to my lecture, Medora? "

"No. You always said we must help and not hinder each other, and that marriage is a co-operation, or nothing. And I'm sure it's better, where we don't think alike, to respect each other's opinions and go our own way."

"What d'you mean? You've said you see eye to eye with me in everything. You've never questioned the substance of the lecture."

"It wasn't for me to question it. But I don't agree with a lot of it."

"Since when?"

"Since first I heard it. I wasn't brought up to feel everybody's equal, and I don't believe they are."

"I don't say they are. What I say is —"

"I know what you say, Jordan. It's no good arguing. You'd hate me if I was false and pretended anything."

"Where do you disagree then?"

"Oh, I don't believe in fighting and taking their money from people. I want peace. If you could see what my life is in this storm of doubt and uncertainty, if you could sympathise with a woman in my position who has given up so much, then you'd surely understand that I've got no heart for all these theories and ideas at present."

"You're getting away from the point," he said. "I can't argue with you because you won't stick to the subject. I do sympathise — all the time — every minute; but my lecture doesn't belong to our private affairs. It doesn't alter them, or delay them. I'm going on with that as quick as Dingle will let me. But I want you to come to the lecture. I ask it, and I expect it."

"You haven't any right to do that. I don't ask you to come to church, so you oughtn't to ask me to come to your lecture. We must be ourselves, and where we don't agree, we mustn't be afraid to say so."

"This is their work at the farm," he declared. "Your uncle's a benighted, ignorant man, and my ideas terrify him, and so he's tried to influence you. And I'm sorry to find he has succeeded."

"Not at all. Uncle Tom would influence nobody; and if you think he'd influence me, that shows you don't respect me as you ought, or give me credit for my brains — though you've praised them often enough."

"I give you credit for everything. You're half my life, and the best half, I should hope. And I trust you to change your mind about this, Medora. It's the biggest thing that's ever happened to me, and I think if you turn it over, you'll see you ought to be there."

"I thought I was the biggest thing that had ever happened to you. However —"

"Leave it — don't decide yet. I'm proud. I wouldn't have you come, of course, if it's not going to interest you. Whether you agree, or whether you don't, I should have thought my first public appearance would mean a lot to you — me being what I am to you."

"It does mean a lot — so much that I'd be so cruel nervous that —"

"But you said the reason —"

"Oh dear," she said, "if you knew how you're making my head ache, Jordan. Leave it alone, for God's sake. I'll come, of course, if you're going to make it a personal thing."

"Not if you don't feel it a personal thing. Come back to me soon, and we'll have a good long talk about it. There mustn't be any difference between us. We're too much to each other for anything like that. And don't see Mr. Dingle again, please, Medora, till I have."

"I'm not likely to see him again."

They had walked round to the top of the "Corkscrew" by this time, and now the bell sounded below that told the dinner hour was ended.

"I must be gone," he said. "Fix your day for coming back, Medora, and Mrs. Trivett will tell me to-morrow. The sooner the better."

"I want to come as quickly as they'll let me," she answered.

Doubt and care were in the young man's eyes. A rare emotion touched him, and there was something yearning in his voice as he stood and held her hands.

"Don't let any shadow rise between us," he begged.

"Of course not; why should it?"

He put his arms round her, and to her surprise kissed her.

"Good-bye — take care of yourself and come back quickly. I won't bother you about the lecture any more," he promised.

Then he ran down the hill, and Medora watched him go. She was regretting the kiss. When she had hungered for kisses, they did not come. Such a thing now was insipid — fruit over-ripe, doubtful as a delicacy past its season. She believed that she had frightened him into this display of emotion. His promise not to trouble her again about the lecture was also a sign of weakness. She thawed, and felt almost sorry for him. Jordan was growing fainter, it seemed to her. His outlines began to blur even after a few days' absence from him. An overpowering desire to see Ned again oppressed her.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE STROKE

MEDORA's native instinct, to fight for her own hand at the expense of the community, now held some strife with her appreciation of what Kellock had done and suffered on her account. At first a sense of justice strove to remind her of their relations and of Jordan's views with respect to her and her future. She was, in fact, as he had declared, his paramount thought and first object in life. And this he felt without any diminution of his personal ambitions. But he had supposed, and she had given him every reason to suppose, that his ambitions and hers were one; that she desired nothing better than to help him in his propagandist work. During the earliest days of their association in London, this had been her purpose and assurance; but it was so no longer. The artificial existence with Kellock had knocked all the poetry out of their relation, and his aspirations now found her averse. Because Kellock could not understand what made life worth living to her, Medora's interest and loyalty alike were withered.

Yet now she put up a struggle for him and it lasted longer than might have been expected. Indeed, it endured for twenty-four hours, until the morning following upon a sleepless night. Then her chivalry and general vague sense of her obligations went down before what she believed, perhaps rightly, was her common sense. She began to see, with a dazzle of conviction, that Kellock was not at all the husband for her; but her woman's wit put it differently: she assured her soul that she was not the wife for Kellock. This step once taken, those that followed were exceedingly

swift, and they appeared first in a conversation, not with the man she desired to meet, but with another. For the present she concealed her new impressions from her family, but on the following Sunday, Mr. Knox came to tea, and was pleasant and agreeable, according to his custom. Tom and Mary Dolbear, gratified to observe the large philosophy with which he had taken his defeat, welcomed him and forgot the hard things they had said and thought about him.

Then, as the hour came for the visitor to return home, Medora made an excuse to accompany him. She was going into Dene to see Daisy Finch and have supper with her and her mother — so she said; and together they went their way.

She wasted no time with Mr. Knox, and having told him what she hungered to tell, changed her mind about Daisy Finch, and went home again. Upon the whole, Mr. Knox disappointed her at this meeting, yet looking back over their conversation, she felt not sorry it had taken place, though her face burned a little when she considered the full weight of some of the vatman's remarks. He did not spare her; but she began to get accustomed to hard words now, and her sagacity told Medora that where there was blame, there was hope. To be past censure is to be past forgiveness.

She began at once to Mr. Knox upon the subject of her husband, and her second sentence indicated the vast strides that her ambition had made. The whole picture of Medora's future in her own eyes was now changed. The new vision looked wild indeed, and made even Medora wince a little to hear it in her own tongue; yet it did not astonish Philander as much as she imagined, though she had reached it sooner than he expected her to do so.

"You see Mr. Dingle sometimes, don't you, Mr. Knox?" began Medora.

"I do, my dear, and you mustn't object if I say I think very well of him. Curiously enough I think a lot of Mr.

Kellock, too. Each have got very good points in his way, and you can learn from them as well as teach them. Of course, it's a ticklish business being friends with both, but so I am, and hope to continue."

"For God's sake, then, implore of Ned not to divorce me! Oh, Mr. Knox, you're wise and old, but you may still remember what it was to be young. Everything's gone if he divorces me — everything. I've been pixy-led, fooled — yes, I have. And I've ruined two good men, through no fault of theirs, or mine. It wasn't Kellock's fault, nor yet Ned's; and I'll swear on my knees it wasn't mine — not altogether, because something not myself drove me and blinded me and dazed me."

"That's moonshine, Medora. You're not going to make anybody believe that; and don't you try — else there'll be the devil to pay. It was your fault — the fault of your character — because a woman and her character must be one. But I grant this; if we can't go outside our characters, and our characters are us and control all we do and think, then, being yourself from no fault of your own, you're not to blame in a sense. Then, again, that won't wash either, because if nobody can do anything outside their characters, then nobody's ever to blame in themselves for anything they do, and there's no such thing as wickedness in the world. Which is nonsense and moonshine again, because we very well know the world's full of wickedness. So it's no good saying, or fooling yourself to think, that you've not been very wicked indeed, because you have. However, like a lot of bigger people than you, you've got less, so far, than you deserve, because the punishment never does fit the evil deed, any more than the reward fits the good one, except in fairy tales. In other words, Kellock, being what he is — a man of the highest possible conduct, with a frosty nature to help it — has saved your bacon so far. You know what I mean. Therefore, there's a ray of hope — not very bright, in my opinion, still, a ray."

"Thank Heaven you think so," said Medora.

"It's only my opinion, mind, and I may very likely be wrong; but I'm a man that sees hope very often where another cannot. A wonderful eye for hope I've got. And if your husband knew all the facts and heard — not that you'd been pixy-led, but that you was properly ashamed of your infamous, hard-hearted, senseless, worthless way of going on, and meant to do better for evermore — luck offering, and the Lord helping — if he heard that, it's just on the cards he might give it a second thought. I don't say he would. I wouldn't in his case — not for a moment; but he's himself — an amazingly large-minded man. So, out of regard for your mother, Medora, I'll venture to touch the subject."

"I'll bless your name for evermore if you do."

"Allow yourself no hope, however. You've got to think of Jordan Kellock, and I tell you frankly I wouldn't move in this matter if I didn't reckon he was utterly mistaken in his opinion of you."

"He is, he is, Mr. Knox! I'm far ways less than what he fancied."

"You are; but don't waste your time eating dirt to me, though you ought to do it all round, no doubt, and heap ashes on your head."

"I know I ought; and Jordan's going to see Ned on Monday evening, so if you, in your great wisdom, could talk to my husband first —"

"I will do so," promised Mr. Knox, and he kept his word. It happened, therefore, that when the hour arrived for the meeting of Kellock and Dingle, much had fallen out beyond the former's knowledge.

Jordan had, of course, been left with plenty to think about by Medora, but since the future was accomplished in his judgment, and its details only a matter of time, he was concerned with far larger questions than agitated her mind. His thoughts ran on to the day when they would be married and their lives mingle happily, to run henceforth

in a single channel. He had never felt fear of that day after once winning her; and he had, until this moment, enjoyed full confidence that they were one in thought and ambition already, only waiting for the completion and crowning of marriage to establish their unity in the face of the world. But Medora had shaken the ingredients of this conviction at their last meeting, and Jordan felt uneasy. If she could speak so strongly on the subject of his lecture, what might she not presently say on the subject of his life? A disloyal thought once crossed his mind; something whispered that her objection to hearing the lecture was humbug. The voice hinted that from no conviction did Medora hold back, since she had already explicitly accepted his fixed principles, and avowed herself their supporter. The voice furthermore ventured to suggest that fixed principles and the lady were never to be mentioned in one breath by any rational observer. But Kellock protested against such insinuations, and continued to seek a reason for her refusal. He could find none, and was forced to accept her own. He was constrained to believe that she actually had changed her opinions, and the reflection that she must never be expected to support him with unqualified enthusiasm cast Jordan down. He did not despair of Medora, but felt that he would be called to do all over again what he had hoped was already done. He must convince her that he was right and weary not until she had come over to his views. After marriage, her mind would gradually take its colour from him, if the operation were conducted painlessly. He satisfied himself that this would happen, and had thought himself into a contented spirit when he went to see Dingle.

Ned said little, and the interview was extraordinary. It did not take long, yet sent Kellock reeling out into the night bewildered, shocked, with the whole scheme of his future existence threatened, and no immediate possibility to retrieve the position.

"You've come, then," began Mr. Dingle. "Well, a

good bit has happened since I saw you last, and, things being what they are here, it looks rather as if I might return to the Mill."

"I hadn't heard nothing of that," answered Jordan.

"You needn't mention it; but Mr. Trenchard is quite willing if I see no objection — so Ernest Trood tells me — and I imagine you'd have nothing to say against it."

"As to that, your plans are not my business. Of course, that might alter my own plans."

"Well, your plans are not my business. In fact, we needn't trouble much about each other in any case."

Jordan reflected.

"No, it wouldn't be natural, though I bear no malice, and I hope you don't," he said.

"Have I shown malice?" asked the beaterman. "Have I taken this outrage in a malicious spirit?"

"You have not."

"I've taken it lying down, and you know it; and I dare say, at the bottom of your heart, you've been more than a bit surprised sometimes to see how I held in."

"You're a thinking, reasonable being."

"Were you? You're not surprised at the line I took, because I did pretty much what you would have done if the positions had been reversed, and I had run away with your wife. But I should have thought you had wit to marvel a bit how a man like me took it so tame. If I could knock you into the water for advising me to be kinder to her, didn't it ever strike you I might have done even a bit more when you stole the woman?"

"As to that, I've understood up to the present you meant to do a bit more. It was made clear to me you were going for damages along with the divorce."

"I thought of it, and I could have got them, no doubt; but what held my hand off you when this happened, holds it still. I'm not going to claim damages."

Kellock was silent for some moments, arguing with himself whether he ought to thank Ned for this concession, or

not. He decided against so doing; but felt it right to explain.

"You might think I ought to thank you for that. But I don't, because, if I did, it would be admitting you had waived what was your right. But I deny you had any right to do such a thing as to try and take my money. Your wife left you of her own free will, and on her own judgment, and came to me, and though the law —"

"We needn't worry about nonsense like that," interrupted Ned. "I've got a bigger thing than that to say. You're so great upon defying the law, and getting everything your own way, and you know so much better than everyone else, the law included, how life should be run, and how we should all behave, that you've rather defeated your own object, Kellock. I dare say some people would think it funny what I'm going to say; but you won't. In fact, you've been hoist with your own bomb, as the saying is, and the reason I didn't go to quod for you is just your own defiance of law. You saved yourself some ugly punishment at the time; but only to get worse at the finish. So what happened was you disobeyed the law, not me."

"This is all a foreign language to me," answered Jordan.

"Is it? Well, you'll see the English of it in half a minute. The good of three people hangs to this, and when I tell you that in my opinion all three will be the losers by your marrying Medora, perhaps you'll begin to see where I'm getting."

"As to that, you'll do well to mind your own business. I can brook no interference from you between me and Medora."

"It isn't so much what you can brook, as what is going to happen. You've taken a very high-minded line about Medora, Kellock — so wonderful high-minded, in fact, that you've got left altogether. You deserve to have a halo and a pair of wings for what you've done — so Philander Knox said, and I quite agree. But you don't deserve to have

Medora. And you're not going to have Medora. You said, 'I'll treat this woman with all proper respect, and all that, till I can marry her'; and that showed you to be a very decent man according to your own lights; and when I heard about it, I spared you; but there's another side. I can't divorce Medora now, because I've got nothing to divorce her for — see? You might think I ought to help you to hoodwink the law in the matter, for the sake of honour and decency — things for which the law has got no use. And I would willingly enough for some people, but not for you. Because what you've done shows a lot of other things — chief being that Medora and you never would get on, really — not as husband and wife. Even as brother and sister, there's been a lot of friction lately, so I hear; and what would it be if you were married? So, you see, when I say you don't deserve Medora, Kellock, I'm not saying anything particular unkind. In fact, the truth is that a man with your nice and superior opinions can't marry another man's wife — not according to law. You ought to have thought of that."

"It's not too late."

"Oh, yes, it is — much too late. You can't go wrong now, even if you thought of such a thing; which you never could. You're damned well out of it in fact; and the longer you live, the better you'll be pleased with yourself, I dare say. The divorce laws may be beneath contempt and only fit for gorillas; but, while they are the laws, you've got to abide by 'em."

Jordan Kellock stared with round, horrified eyes. Even in his dismay and grief he could wonder how the simple Ned had reached this high present standpoint, and was able to address him like a father lecturing a child. He began to recognise the hand of Mr. Knox.

Now he pulled himself together, rose, and prepared to be gone.

"I can only imagine that others have helped you to this extraordinary decision, Dingle."

"I don't deny it. I never was one to think I could run my own show, or play a lone hand. A pity you didn't feel the same. A lone hand always comes to grief. You talk to Philander Knox about this. He's a great admirer of yours. But he's looked at it from the outside, as a student of character. He's got no axe to grind about it."

"And Medora?"

"I don't care a cuss about her. As to her line, you'd better inquire at headquarters. I haven't seen her again, and don't much want to."

"This flings her on to the mercy of society, Dingle."

"Well, society won't eat her. Society's pretty merciful, so far as I can see. You talk it over with her, and get her views of the situation — whatever they may be."

"I'll only ask one question. Does she know that you don't intend to divorce her?"

"She does not. I only decided myself half an hour before you called."

"Is it possible for me to prevail with you to change your mind, Mr. Dingle?"

"No; because with your views of what's straight and honourable, you won't try. You know I can't divorce her. Why? Because you was too good and clean a man to make it possible. So long. Just you think over all I've said. You don't know your luck yet, but you will."

Jordan Kellock went out into the darkness, and he staggered like a man in drink. He tottered down the hill from Ashprington, and intended to start then and there for Cornworthy and Medora; but he found himself physically unequal to any such pilgrimage. His knees shook and his muscles were turned to wool. He walked to the inn, ascended to bed, and lay phantom-ridden through the hours of an interminable night. The shock of what he had heard was so great that his mind was too stunned to measure it. A situation, that demanded deepest reflection by its own horror, robbed him of the power to reflect. He lay and panted like a wounded animal. He could not think

by reason of the force of his feelings. He could only lick his smarting wounds. Then he fell into genuine grief for Medora's plight. Actual physical symptoms intruded. He found his eyes affected and strange movements in his heart and stomach. His hands shook in the morning, and he cut himself shaving — a thing that he had not done for years. He could not eat, yet suffered from a sensation of emptiness. Daylight by no means modified his sense of loss and chaos. It found him before all things desirous to see Medora; but, by the time he was up and dressed, this purpose failed him for a season, and his thoughts were occupied with Knox. Then he turned again to Medora, and felt that life must be suspended until he could see her and break to her what had happened. It was now too late to visit Cornworthy until the day's work should be done, and remembering how often work had saved a situation, solved a problem and helped him through difficult hours, Kellock proceeded to the Mill, and was thankful to be there. He felt that labour would calm his nerves, restore his balance, and assist him, before the evening came, to survey his situation in the light of this convulsion. He found himself entirely interested in what Medora would do; and he believed that he knew. His heart bled for her.

Thus absorbed, he reached the vat. He was engaged upon the largest sheets of drawing-paper at the time — work calling for more than average lifting power and muscular energy — and he was glad that now, for a while, work must take the first demand upon mind and body alike.

The vats were full, and the machinery hummed overhead; coucher and layer stood at their places, and Jordan, slipping his deckle upon the mould, grasped it with thumb on edge, and sank it into the pulp.

Elsewhere Knox, Robert Life and others had taken up their positions at the breast of the vats with their assistants about them, and the work of paper-making went on its immemorial way.

Then that happened that was long remembered — an

incident of interest and concern for the many, a tragedy for the one. Kellock brought up his mould, and instead of proceeding with the rhythmic actions to right and left — those delicate operations of exquisite complexity where brain telegraphed to muscle, and motor and sensory nerves both played their part in the completion of the "stroke" — instead of the usual beautiful and harmonious gestures that drained the mould and laid a sweet, even face of paper upon it, he found forces invisible at his elbows and an enemy still more terrible within. His brain hung fire; a wave of horrible doubt and irresolution swept over him. It ran through the physical parts engaged — his arms and breast muscles and the small of his back. He stared at the mould, turned and washed off the faulty sheet he had created, and made an attempt at a jest to Harold Spry, who was watching, all eyes.

"Where are my wits, Harold?" he said. Then he took a deep breath, and dipped the mould again.

Spry and the layer watched sympathetically. To their eyes there seemed no failure as Kellock drew up his load; but he knew. A condition of tremendous tension raised his heart-beat to a gallop, and his eyes grew misty. He gasped like a drowning man, and felt the sweat beading on his forehead.

"I'll — I'll just get a breath of air and come back," he said, dropped the mould, and went out of the shop. Spry washed the mould, then he walked down the line of vats and spoke to Knox. A man came from the engine house with a message, and Ernest Trood also entered with some information for Robert Life. What he heard made him hasten out of doors to find Kellock sitting up on a form at the entrance of the vat house with his head in his hands.

"What's the matter, my son?" asked Trood, kindly enough; but a look at Jordan told him all he feared to hear.

The young man's expression had changed, and there was fear in his eyes, as though they had just mirrored some

awful thing. The resolute, closely-knit Kellock seemed to have fallen to pieces. Every limb indicated the nerve storm under which he suffered. Trood was experienced, and knew the danger. He believed that Kellock had given in too soon.

"Fight — fight like hell!" he said. "Don't run away from it. Don't give it time to get into you. Come back now, lad — this minute. At your age, it's nothing — just indigestion, or a chill about you. If you let it fester, you'll go from bad to worse, and very like have to knock off for six months before you look at a mould again."

"It's no good — it's gone," said the younger man; but he obeyed, and followed Trood into the vat house.

Knox had warned the rest to ignore the sufferer, and no man took any notice of Kellock as he returned.

Spry was waiting, and greeted him cheerfully.

"You're all right again — your eyes are all right," he said.

Trood turned his back on Kellock, and everybody was at work as usual. He made a tremendous effort with himself, called up his utmost resolution, smiled and nodded to Spry, who was whistling, gripped his deckle to the mould, and then strove to think of something else, pursue his business in the usual mechanical fashion, and let his unconscious but highly trained energies pursue their road.

But it was not to be. Some link had strained, if not broken, in the complexus of brain and nerve and muscle. Perfect obedience was lacking; a rebel had crept into the organism. For once, the man's expressionless face was alive with expression; for once his steady and monotonous voice vibrated.

"It's all up," he said to Harold Spry.

Then he put down the mould.

Trood was beside him in an instant, and Knox came also. Elsewhere those who had no love for Kellock talked under their breath together. Others, who came and went, took the news.

Trood made the vatman try again ; but only once. He saw in a moment that the breakdown could not be bluffed ; the fault in the machine was too deep.

Jordan put on his coat, and Trood arranged to drive him to Totnes presently to see a doctor. The young man was calm, but his will power appeared suspended. He looked into the faces of his companions for any ray of comfort ; and the fact that he could do so was testimony to his collapse.

He went back to " The Waterman's Arms " presently ; and through the Mill like lightning flashed the news that Kellock had lost his stroke.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DOCTOR

As soon as Mrs. Trivett heard the bad news she stopped work, explained to her second in command the gravity of the situation, and hastened home as fast as she could go to Medora. Now or never might her daughter show what she was worth, and she felt that her girl's place should be beside the sufferer. Duty and love alike prompted in that direction; indeed, Medora herself appeared to view the disaster with her mother's eyes.

"Good Lord! Lost his stroke! Poor man," she cried. "I must go to him. Is he ill? Have you seen him? What was the cause of it? Does he say what he's going to do about it?"

"I haven't seen him. He's gone back to the inn, and Mr. Trood takes him into Totnes presently to the doctor. And it's your place to go along with them in my opinion."

Medora's mind moved swiftly. She knew that Kellock was to have seen Ned Dingle on the previous evening, and eagerly she awaited information of what had happened at that meeting. Jordan intended to have come over to Priory Farm after working hours; but now she could hear even sooner than she expected.

"I shan't leave him if he's very bad," said Medora.

"In no case, better or worse, will you leave him," declared Lydia. "This is a fearful thing to overtake a vat-man, and you, of all people, ought to be at his side to cheer him and encourage him and help him to hope. It's a nervous breakdown along of all this waiting and trouble."

"More likely the lecture," suggested Medora. "Small

wonder if his lecture is got on his mind and upset him. And he was to see Ned yesterday. Perhaps Ned said something to do it."

Lydia sighed.

"Things be come to a climax, seemingly. Mr. Knox whispered to me that Ned might have a bit of good news for Kellock. On the other hand, perhaps he had not. Any way, your good is Jordan's good, and his evil is your evil now; so you'd best to get to him as quick as you can, and stop with him if he wishes you to do so, as he doubtless will."

In a couple of hours Medora sat at "The Waterman's Arms." She expected an emotional meeting, and indeed felt emotional. For a time Jordan's sufferings weighed with her, and she found sympathy wakening for him. But he appeared much as usual, and while gratified at her swift return, held himself well in hand and made no great parade of his misfortune.

"Mother properly scared me to death," explained Medora. "I do hope to God it's not as bad as she said. How d'you feel, dear? You look pale."

"I feel all right in myself."

"It's that lecture. Why don't you give it up?"

"No, Medora. It's nothing to do with the lecture. I can think of the lecture calmly enough. I'm very glad you came so quick. It's a comfort to me first, and second, I've got a lot to tell you. You must brace yourself, for it's bad news."

"More?"

"What has lost me my stroke happened last night, Medora. I saw Mr. Dingle, and I heard more than enough to put any man off his stroke."

"You don't mean to say he's going to take your money?"

"My money! Good powers, what's that? He can have my money to the last penny if he likes. It's far worse. I hate to say it — it's enough to kill any pure woman —

it's very nearly killed me, I believe; but you've got to hear it, Medora, though it sweeps away the firm ground from under our feet and leaves us without any foothold. He — he won't divorce you!"

She exhibited ample concern at this intelligence. Indeed, she very nearly fainted in earnest, and Kellock, who only observed the physical shock, doubted not that it sprang from emotion entirely creditable to Medora.

"You can guess what I felt and how I tried to bring him to a better frame of mind. But he's a different man from what he used to be. I couldn't believe I was listening to Dingle. Changed into something outside his real character. It shows how weak natures can be influenced. Others have been getting at him — enemies to us for certain. It's a cruel, wicked thing, and it knocked me out, as you see. But I'm not concerned with myself. I've got to think of you, Medora, and the future — our future. Of course, what really hurts the soul of man or woman is what they inflict upon themselves; but all the same — there it is — if he don't divorce you, where are we?"

"Where we were," she said, and strove to make her voice sufficiently mournful. But she guessed that it would be difficult to discuss this tremendous information without sooner or later revealing her true sentiments.

"Don't let's talk about it for the present," she continued. "The future will take care of itself — it always does. For the minute, I'm only troubled about your health and happiness, Jordan. Whatever comes of this, we've been through a great experience, and the end of it all is this shock to your nerves."

" 'The end of it all,' Medora? "

"I mean, so far as we've got. You are the only one to think about for the minute — not me and not Dingle. The first thing is your health and strength, and I'm not going to leave you again, Jordan, till you're set up, and find yourself as clever as ever you were."

"If you come to the lecture, that would go a long way to quieting my nerves."

"Of course I'll come. I always meant to come. It was only a bit of temper saying I wouldn't — I never thought not to come. But will you be well enough to give it?"

"Oh, yes. This flurry arose from causes outside the lecture, and quite outside *the* Cause. You understand?"

"Yes," she answered. "I do understand, and I'm thankful for it, Jordan; because I know very well it means much more to you than your own trade. And our little lives are as nothing to the big things in your mind."

"If I never made paper again," he assured her, "it would be less — far less — of a grief and disaster to me than if I was shut off from taking my part in the great struggle for Labour."

"You'll do both; you'll do both. It's only a passing shock. You'll forget all about it, I hope, and be at work again as well as ever in a few days."

"I don't think so, Medora. As far as that goes, I believe it's serious. I haven't had time to collect my thoughts yet, and it's no good worrying till I've seen the doctor; but I'm none too hopeful. If the stroke once goes, it wants a lot of careful nursing to get it back, and often enough it's gone for good."

"Only with men who drink, and that kind of thing. Such a one as you — a saint — and strong in body and mind, and healthy every way — of course it will come back."

"We must be frank with ourselves," he said. "We must tell the doctor the truth. My stroke was shocked away. And sometimes what's shocked away can only be shocked back."

"That's an idea," said Medora.

She was always quick to fasten on ideas and his words made her thoughtful for a moment. She registered his statement for future consideration, then flowed on again. She was cheerful, sympathetic, and full of consolation.

Indeed, presently, as Kellock grew grateful, she began to think she might be overdoing the part. For it was, if not wholly, at least in large measure an impersonation now. She was acting again, and she played with a purpose and exceeding concern to touch the right note, but avoid over-emphasis upon it. Kellock appeared to be in two minds, and he looked at her and held her hand.

"I want to say something," he declared presently; "but I won't. I'll keep it off, because I'm not very strong for the moment, and the spoken word once spoken remains. This is a great crisis all round. I hope good will come out of trouble, as it often does. We've had enough to shake us cruelly to-day — both of us — and I won't add to it. And what's in my thoughts may look different to-morrow, so I'll keep it there."

"Don't think any more about anything," she begged him. "Just let your mind rest, or talk about the lecture. And don't you think, whatever happens, and whatever is in store for me, that it is going to lessen your great future. Perhaps it was the strangeness of your ideas that made me shrink from them."

He began to discuss his ruling passion. She kept him easily to that.

Presently they ate together, and when Ernest Trood drove up in a dog-cart, lent by Mr. Trenchard, he found Kellock calm and contented. Medora sat behind, and joined in the conversation as they trotted through the green lanes to Totnes.

The master had sent cheering messages to Jordan, and hoped to see him on the following day.

"He's not a bit troubled," said Trood. "He reckons that with a man of your fine physique and constitution — a man that lives the life you lead — this is a flea-bite — just a shake-up along of some trifle. And if you've got to chuck it and go away for six weeks even, he's not going to trouble about it."

"Like him," said Kellock. "But it won't be any ques-

tion of six weeks, or six days, Ernest. I've got a feeling about this that I shall be right in twenty-four hours, or not at all. I'm not letting it get on my nerves, you understand. If it's gone, it's gone. There's plenty of work for me in the world, whether at the vat, or somewhere else."

"Never heard better sense," answered the foreman. "All the same, don't you throw up the sponge — that would be weak. You must remember you're a great paper maker, Jordan, and there are not any too many of 'em left in England now-a-days. So it's up to every man that's proud of his business to stick to it."

"You take that to heart, Jordan," advised Medora. "Not that there isn't greater work in the world than paper-making — we all know that."

"No, we don't know anything of the sort," answered Trood. "Don't you talk nonsense, Medora, because I won't hear it. Paper stands for civilisation, and the better the paper, the higher the civilisation. You'd soon see that if anything happened to spoil paper and raise the price of rag. If the quality of paper goes down, that's a sure sign the quality of civilisation's doing the same. By its paper you can judge a nation, and English paper, being the best in the world, helps to show we're first in the world. And if a man like Kellock was to hide his light under a bushel, his conscience would very soon tell him about it."

Jordan smiled at Mr. Trood's enthusiasm.

"I love my work," he said, "and should never give it up, unless it gave me up, Ernest, but for one reason — that I could do something better."

"That you never would, if they made you king of England," replied the foreman. "You'd never be so good at anything else as you are at paper-making, because you've got the natural genius for the job. That's your gift — and you may lecture or you may stand on your head, or do any other mortal thing, but you won't do it as well as you do your work at the vat."

The doctor found not much amiss with Jordan. He

heard all particulars, and made a searching examination of the patient's fine frame.

"Never saw a healthier, or more perfect man," he declared. "You're a long way above the average, and as healthy as a ten year old. Muscles hypertrophied a bit — you'd be muscle-bound in fact for any other work but your own; but your organs are as sound as a bell; there's nothing whatever to show why you've broken down. It would be cruelty to animals to give you physic. What d'you drink and smoke?"

"I drink water, doctor. I don't smoke."

"Might have known it. Well, go away for a fortnight. Run up to Dartmoor, and walk ten miles a day, or twenty, if you like. Then you'll be all right. This breakdown must have been mental, seeing it was nothing else. Have you got anything on your mind?"

"Yes, I have."

"Get it off then, and you'll be all right."

Kellock nodded.

"Thank you very much. I shall soon see a way, I hope."

"Let a way come then; don't worry to find it. Don't worry about anything. Go up to Dartmoor — Dartmoor's a very good doctor — though his fees get higher every year, they tell me. I seem to know your name, by the way. Where did I see it?"

"Posted up perhaps, doctor. I'm going to give a lecture here next week."

"Ah — so it was. Socialism — eh? Is the lecture getting on your nerves?"

"No, not at all. But I hope it'll get on other people's. I look forward to it."

"Well, get to Dartmoor, and if your stroke doesn't come back when you return, see me again."

Kellock repeated his interview exactly, and Mr. Trood was much gratified. They went home in the best of spirits, and that evening Medora devoted to Jordan. He became

more and more distracted and pre-occupied, however. She avoided personal subjects, and wanted him to read the lecture aloud; but this he would not do.

"Now that you are going to hear it," he said, "I'll let you off till then."

He declared himself tired and went to his bed before ten o'clock. But he did not sleep. He had much thinking to do, and many hours elapsed before he arrived at any conclusion. His mind was entirely occupied with Medora, and her future caused him to pass through deep anxieties and fruitless regrets. Her loyal attitude that day had moved him much, for he supposed that Dingle's decision must have come upon her with force at least as crushing as it had fallen on himself. Yet how bravely she had borne it, how unselfishly she had put it away from her, and devoted herself to him and his tribulations! Doubtless now, alone, she too considered the gravity of the situation, and lay awake in distress.

He had a human impulse to go and comfort her, to declare that nothing mattered while they shared their great love, to explain that since Dingle would not legally release her, they must take the law into their own hands. But another, and far more characteristic line of thought developed, and in the dominating and directing forces awakened by it, he followed his natural bent, and at last arrived at a decision. He perceived his duty towards Medora, albeit action appeared impossible until he had spoken with her. Yet, to put the matter before Medora might defeat his object, for there could be no doubt that Medora was his heart and soul. He felt, therefore, that he must, after all, act without her knowledge, for he believed that if she knew his purpose, she would strive to prevent it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CONFESSION

IN the evening of Kellock's catastrophe, Philander Knox saw Ned Dingle, who was working in his garden at the time.

"Heard the latest?" he asked.

"The latest for me is that Mr. Trenchard will take me back if I like to come."

"No, the latest for you is that Jordan Kellock's lost his stroke."

Ned dropped a packet of seeds.

"Has he, by God! That's the best news I've heard for a good bit."

"You're glad, but you won't be glad if you think over it."

Knox explained the circumstances, and told the tale of Jordan's failure.

"Poor devil," said Ned. "I can't say I'm sorry all the same. It won't last. He'll get it back, no doubt, and perhaps he'll see now he can't go playing fast and loose with people, same as he did, and not get a facer himself sometimes. I told him I wasn't going to divorce my wife, and no doubt that's bowled him over."

"You've done very well so far, in my opinion," declared Mr. Knox. "You've conducted the affair in a high-class way, and you and me know where we stand; but he don't, and more does she."

"I'm in your hands," answered Ned. "I begin to find better every day you're right, Knox. And what did she do when she heard he was down and out?"

"Took a very proper line," answered Philander.

"Some, feeling what she feels and knowing that she'd done with him, for evermore, whatever happened, would have left him to stew in his own juice; but Medora, having a very fine pride, would have despised herself for any such littleness as that. I see as clear as day what was in her mind. She said to herself, 'I've been a silly fool, and so has he. We were lost to sense and reality, and acted in a mad and improper manner. In fact, we've been everything we could be, except wicked, and silliness is often punished worse than wickedness. But, though Kellock richly deserved to lose his stroke, it's as much my fault as his own that he has done so, and I'm too sporting to turn my back on him at such a moment. If he's ruined, then it's my hard duty to share his trouble, and I won't be a rat and quit a sinking ship. That's not the sort of woman Ned Dingle married.' So Medora argued, no doubt — not knowing, of course, what you've said to Kellock. So she went to him, and they've gone to Totnes this evening along with Ernest Trood to see a doctor. Thus you see, for her proper and womanly behaviour, Medora will be rewarded — as we sometimes are if we do rightly — sooner or later."

"How rewarded?" asked Ned.

"Why, by hearing presently from the man that you're not going to divorce her. She plays her part to him and cheers him up and takes a hopeful view of the disaster, and so on; and then she hears what brought it all about — your strong line. Of course, to her ear — she being now a contrite creature with the scales fallen from her eyes — the fact that you wouldn't set her free to marry him was the best music she could hear. She'll know with you taking that line, she'll be free of Kellock for evermore, and able to set about her own salvation in fear and trembling. And that, no doubt, is what she'll do, for having paid for girlish faults, she'll now cultivate her womanly virtues and become as fine a creature in mind as she is in body, and rise to be worthy of our admiration again."

Ned listened to this long speech while he sowed carrots.

"These things don't happen by chance," concluded Knox. "A man like you bends fate to his own purpose; and fate, being a female, does a lot more for them that drive her than them that spoil her. You stand in a very strong position now, and the lucky thing is that the strong can be merciful to the weak without losing their self-respect."

"I'll see Kellock," promised Ned. "I'll see him tomorrow and hear what he's got to say about it."

"A very good thought, but let your mind dwell on Medora a bit before you do. You think so clear and see so straight that you won't make any mistake in that quarter. You've got to remember how it looks to Kellock so far, and whether it looks right to him, or whether it do not. Now Kellock only knows as yet that you don't put away Medora; and that means he can't marry her, so this brother and sister racket must end. As for Mrs. Dingle, she's done with the masculine gender, and, of course, she may have told Kellock so — I can't say as to that. But you see him by all means."

They talked till dusk fell, then Mr. Knox departed and Ned considered all he had said, with the imputations proper to Philander's words. He had trusted largely to the vatman of late, and found himself in agreement with his sentiments on all occasions, for Knox was treating Ned with rare diplomacy.

Next morning, Jordan himself anticipated his visitor, and as Ned set out to see him, he appeared at Ashprington. He wore holiday attire, looked pale, and was somewhat nervous.

They met at the gate of Dingle's house, and Ned spoke.

"Come in the house, and you can speak first — no, I will."

They entered the little parlour and sat down opposite each other.

"I hear you've lost your stroke. I suppose to find

what I meant to do was a bit too shattering. No doubt you'll get it back. I've no wish to come between you and your livelihood; but when you and my wife hatched this bit of wickedness, you didn't stop to think whether it would play hell with my nerves; and if you'd known it would, that wouldn't have changed you."

"That's quite true," admitted Kellock, "and, I may tell you, it's come home to me pretty sharp before you said it. As for me, I may get my stroke again, or I may not; and if I don't, I shall never blame you — I shall blame myself. Those that think they stand, often get a fall, and I'm not too proud to confess to you that that's what has happened to me."

"Serve you right."

"I don't matter any more. What matters is Medora, and I shall be greatly obliged if you'll allow me to speak a few words on that subject."

"The fewer the better."

"I come from myself, understand. She knows nothing about it. I didn't ask her, because if she'd said 'no,' I couldn't have come. And she might have forbid."

"Well, get on with it."

"It's very difficult, and I beg you'll make allowances for a man who has done wrong and done you wrong, too. You'll probably say that I'm only changed since you told me you weren't going to divorce Medora. That's true in a way, but not all true. I've learned a great deal I didn't know from Medora, but I've only come now to talk about her. The question is how you feel about her."

"That's my business, not yours."

"I don't know that, because as you feel, so I must do. I recognise my obligations sharp enough, and she is the first of them if you ordain she is to be. I've thought a lot about it you may be sure, and I've recognised one thing fairly clearly — I did before you struck this blow. I'm not a marrying man, Mr. Dingle."

"Nobody ever thought you were but that fool."

"It wasn't her fault. We were both wrong — that's all. And I want to say this. I wouldn't marry Medora now if I could, because I've been brought to see I shouldn't make her happy. A brother I'm prepared to be; but for her own sake, and for her future, I wouldn't marry her if I could now, because I should be doing her a wrong. Of course, you'll say I'm putting this on because you won't let me marry her; but I swear to you that I'd begun to feel it before."

"That lets you out then — with your tail between your legs. And what price her?"

"That's why I've called this morning. I can't say anything to Medora until I've spoken to you, because it's clear that what I must do depends upon you. If you've done with her, then I shall support her and be as good a brother as I know how to be."

"Have you ever seen the man who would take a woman back after these games? Would you, if you was me?"

"I'd think a lot before I refused, if I was you. Knox tells me that it's a very uncommon case, but quite in keeping with my character. You understand, I've said nothing to Medora. Of course, she knows what the price is she's got to pay. The appearance of evil is as bad in this case as evil itself; so she's doomed if you doom her, but saved if you save her. Would it be asking too much to ask you to see her?"

"I have seen her."

"Not since she knew the situation. We often learn a lesson when it's too late to profit by the knowledge, and it's for you to judge if that will be the case with Medora. I'm only raising the question, and I don't want to fill her head with false hopes. She's been too much of a lady to say anything out; but she's shown her feelings on the subject in a good many ways."

"She's fed up with you, in fact?"

"Yes; I believe that is so. In a way, to use a homely sort of illustration, what we did was to keep company —

no more than that; and that showed her very clear I'm not the right company; and it's shown me, as I say, I'm not a marrying man. So there it is. I can promise you your wife will want for nothing, and I shall regard her destiny as in my hands in future, if you're off her for good. And if you change your mind and divorce her, I'll swear it won't be me that marries her. That you can take on oath. I'll tell her so to-day."

Kellock rose to go, and Ned remained silent and seated.

"Remember, if you do see her, you'll see a wiser and sadder woman," the vatman ventured to add.

"No doubt. You'd make anybody sadder and wiser. When are you going to try for your stroke again?"

"I don't know."

"Nobody will pity you when they hear how you lost it."

"You'll find Mrs. Dingle along with her people at Priory Farm if you want her. She means to come to my lecture next week; but not if you've any objection, of course. And I beg you to understand that I'm heartily sorry for what I've done, and I'm punished a lot worse than you could punish me. To lose my stroke is nought; to lose my self-respect is everything."

"You'll get 'em both back — such an amazing creature as you," said Dingle dourly.

Then Kellock went away, and the man who had listened to him little guessed at his soreness of spirit. Jordan indeed had the satisfaction of clearing his soul and confessing his weakness and failure; but he suffered ample degradation and discomfort under his right-doing. Nor did he believe that his end was likely to be gained. Doubting, he had taken his proposal to Ashprington; still doubting, he returned. Indeed, he felt sure from Ned's attitude, both to him and Medora, that the girl would remain on his hands. A subtler man had felt every reason to hope from Dingle's blunt comments, but he read nothing behind them. He only believed that he had eaten dirt for nought; yet he did not regret his confession of wrong; for his bent of mind

was such that he knew he must have made it sooner or later.

The future looked dark and sad enough. He was confused, downcast. Even the thought of the lecture had no present power to cheer him. But he told himself that he had done his duty to Medora, and suspected that, had she heard his appeal to her husband, she might have thanked him.

And elsewhere Dingle pondered the problem. Curiously enough, only a point, which had seemed unimportant to anybody else, held his mind. Kellock had said Medora was changed, and such is human inconsistency, that whereas Ned had told himself for six months he was well rid of a bad woman, now the thought that he might receive back into his house a reformed character annoyed him. If he wanted anybody, it was the old Medora — not the plague, who left him for Kellock, but the laughter-loving, illusive help-mate he had married. He did not desire a humbled and repentant creature, ready to lick his boots. He was very doubtful if he really wanted anybody. Once the mistress of any man, he would never have thought of her again except to curse her; but she never had been that. She had doubtless shared Jordan's exalted ideals. That was to her credit, and showed she honoured her first husband and the stock she sprang from.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BARGAIN

THROUGH bright moonlight, that made the young leaves diaphanous and melted on the grass lands in grey mist, men and women were walking home to Ashprington from Totnes. Not less than five-and-twenty had gone from the Mill to hear Jordan Kellock's lecture on socialism; and as they trudged homeward they discussed it.

He had surprised all his listeners and many were full of enthusiasm before the future he indicated; but some were angry; some went in doubt. The younger men were with him and the older could not deny that there was reason and pitiless justice behind his demands. The women who heard him wondered at the ease with which he had spoken and held his audience. They were impressed with the applause that had greeted his sentiments and judged that he must have right on his side to have won a reception so enthusiastic.

Henry Barefoot, the boilerman, walked by Ernest Trood, while Harold Spry and Daisy Finch listened to them.

"It's got to come," declared Barefoot. "We used to talk of these problems in the merchant marine twenty-five years ago, and we knew then that things weren't right; but our generation was dumb, because our brains weren't educated to pull together. We ate our mouldy biscuits and rancid salt pork and shivered in a gale of wind, because we knew the ship's bottom was rotten; and we cursed the owners out of their snug beds ashore to hell; but we was driven cattle, you may say — had to go on with it — because there was nothing else for sailor men to do. But our children have gone to school. That's the difference."

"And the rich men sent 'em there, Henry," said Mr. Trood.

"They did, because they hadn't any choice, Ernest. If they'd known what would come of it, they'd have kept 'em out of school and left the poor man's children to fill the rich men's pockets, instead of giving them their birthright of education. 'Twasn't squire and parson sent 'em to school, but those who had a fairer sense of justice; and long-headed chaps like Kellock are the result."

"He's got a lot to learn, however. There's no such things as equality and never can be. Because men ain't born equal, Henry."

"He don't argue that, Mr. Trood," explained Spry. "He argues that we are handicapped out of the hunt from the start. He says, 'let all start fair'; he don't say all can win."

"Yes, he does," returned Trood. "He says all should win. He tells us that a man's intellect is an accident, and that, in justice, them with big brains should give their superfluity to the fools, so as all should share and share alike. And that's not human nature. Am I, that have worked like a slave to win my position and put all my heart and soul into paper-making from my youth up, to go and seek that lazy dog I sacked last week and say: 'You're a damned, worthless waster, but here's half my wages'?"

"I grant he was out there," admitted Barefoot. "'The race is to the strong,' but socialism don't seem to see that. Given a fair start for all and food and clothes and education, then the good boy gets his chance; but even if that was so, as things are he'd never be allowed to compete with the gentleman's son."

"Yes, he would," answered Trood. "There's nothing in the world, even as it's run now, to stop brains. There's boys who were charity school boys thirty years ago that the world listens to very respectfully to-day. But Kellock's let a lot of class hatred come into his talk, and

hatred breeds hatred. Never a man wanted power more than him, but his sort go the wrong way to work with their bluster and threats. They don't help: they're out for blood. We're a very fair country at heart and under our constitution we've grown to be the finest people on earth. So, naturally, as a whole, the nation don't want the Constitution swept away till we can get a better. The socialists have no traditions, and don't agree among themselves yet, and I for one wouldn't trust people that scoff at tradition and want to be a law to themselves. They would be a great danger, Henry, and if we got all to pieces like that and in sight of civil wars and revolution, we should throw ourselves open to attack from our enemies. Then, while we were wrangling how to govern ourselves, we'd damn soon find England was going to be governed by somebody else."

"There's plenty of hungry eyes on the British Empire no doubt," allowed Mr. Barefoot.

"Plenty; and if our army and navy got bitten with this stuff, it would be good-bye to everything. And that wouldn't suit Kellock's friends."

"And be it as it will," said Daisy Finch, "a paper mill isn't a charity. Those that run the Mill have got to live, I suppose."

"Yes, Daisy," admitted Trood; "but we must be fair to this Kellock, though I'm far from supporting what he says. The ills are as he stated them; the remedies are not as he stated 'em. He argues that the workman's work should no more be his whole life than work is his master's whole life. Because Capital buys a man's working hours, it doesn't buy his life and liberties. Outside his work, he's as much right to enjoy being alive as his employer. A machine looks very different from the owner's point of view and the worker's. The owner's the master of the machine; the worker is its slave; and it's on the worker the machine puts the strain, not on the owner. So we have got to consider our working hours in relation to our lives as a

whole, and balance work against life, and consider how our labour affects our existence. A six hour day at a machine may be a far greater tax on a man or woman than an eight hour day at the desk, or the plough. You've got to think of the nervous energy, which ain't unlimited."

"That's so," admitted Barefoot. "Life's the only adventure we can hope for, and I grant you there ought to be more to it. 'Tis all this here speeding up, I mistrust. The masters see the result of 'speeding up,' and think it's all to the good according; but it's we feel the result, and I can tell you I'm never more cranky and bad-tempered and foul-mouthed than after one of them rushes. The strain is only pounds, shillings and pence to the masters; but it's flesh and blood and nerves to us; because it's us have got to fight the machines, not them."

"A very true word, Henry. Kellock's out for security, and whether you're a socialist or whether you're not, you can't deny security is the due of every human creature. Until the highest and lowest alike are born into security, there's something wrong with the order of things."

"Yet the greater number of the nation have no more security than a bird in a bush. Let us but lose our health, and where are we?" asked Barefoot.

"And if a machine is going to make us lose our health," argued Spry, "then to hell with the machine."

"We want shorter hours and better money," explained Ernest Trood, "and that can only be won if the masters also get better money. And for such a result we must look to machines."

Then Daisy Finch asked a question.

"Who were those stern-looking men in black ties listening to the lecture?" she inquired.

"From Plymouth, I believe," answered her sweetheart. "They meant business, and they applauded Kellock at the finish."

"They see a likely tool to help their plots," said Mr.

Trood. "I hope he'll get his stroke back and drop this Jack-o'-lantern job. There's quite enough at it without him."

"He don't think so," answered Barefoot. "He wants to be in the movement, and may rise to be a leader some day. They socialists are as ambitious as anybody at heart."

Harold and Miss Finch, weary of the subject, slowed their gait, fell back, and presently turned to their own affairs. Then a trap passed, driven by Mr. Tom Dolbear, from Priory Farm. He had brought his sister and Medora to the lecture, and was now taking them home again. With them travelled Mr. Knox.

The farmer alone found no good word for the things they had listened to.

"Just the gift of the gab," he said. "If you can talk easy, you're tempted to do so, at the expense of work."

"Talking is working when you're out for a cause," explained Knox. "Kellock's not a talker in the way we are. In fact, a very silent man, and thinks a great deal more than he talks; but with practice and a bit of exercise to strengthen his voice, he'd be as good as any of the talking brigade; and though you may not agree with him, you can't deny he's got the faith to move mountains. He's preaching a gospel that Labour's perfectly ready and willing to hear, and he'll be an easy winner presently, because it's half the battle won to tell people the things they'll welcome. Everybody was with him from the start, and the harder he hit, the better they liked it."

"I didn't think Totnes had gone so radical now-a-days," said Mrs. Trivett.

"More it has," declared Mr. Dolbear. "That wasn't Totnes. 'Twas no more than a handful of discontented people, who don't know what they want."

"Make no mistake as to that," answered Knox. "The brains of Totnes was there — the thinking ones that ain't satisfied; and they do know what they want very well in-

deed; and Kellock's talk only said what the others feel. He's got a gift in my opinion, and I'm with him more than half the way. If you allow for ignorance and impatience of youth, and so on — if you grant all that, there's still enough left to make a reputation. He'll never be a happy man, but he'll make his mark and have the satisfaction of being somebody in the labour world. He's got the touch."

Medora considered curiously with herself under the night. Her own changed attitude surprised her most. She had heard the applause and riot that greeted Jordan's speech. She had seen him stand there, self-contained and strong and successful, before three hundred people. She had marked his power to impress them, and awaken enthusiasm. She had seen older men than himself lifted to excitement by his speech. She had noted how many men and women pressed forward to shake hands with him when he had finished. She remembered the chairman's praise. All these things had actually filled her dreams of old. She had prophesied to him that such events would some day happen, and that his power must become known, given the opportunity. And now, far sooner than either had expected such a thing, it had come and justified Medora's prophecies. She wondered whether Kellock was remembering all she had foretold. As for herself, she looked at him now as at a picture that hung in somebody else's parlour. She witnessed the sunrise of his first triumph, but found herself perfectly indifferent and not desirous of one ray of reflected light. Her mind had passed from Kellock to other interests, and if she were ever to be a contented woman, it would not be Kellock who achieved that consummation.

"Jordan was to attend a meeting of his branch after the lecture," she said to Knox. "I expect after such a success as that, they'll want him to give the lecture somewhere else."

"I'm thinking of the effect on his nature," answered

Knox. "And I believe all that applause will be a better tonic than Dartmoor, and make the man well."

"You think it will fetch his stroke back again?" asked Mrs. Trivett.

"That's just what I do think, Lydia. He'll be walking on air after such a triumph as that. He'll fear nothing when he comes back to the vat, and all will go right."

Then, Mr. Knox, for private ends, and suspecting he had praised Kellock enough, turned on the lecture, and began to display its fallacies and errors. For Medora's benefit he examined the young man, and declared that his address revealed the defects of his qualities. But he need not have been at the trouble to occupy himself thus; Medora knew a great deal more about the real Jordan than it was possible for Mr. Knox to know.

She listened, but took no more part in the conversation. They proceeded down the steep lane into Ashprington presently, and at Ned Dingle's home, Knox, to their surprise, bade Mr. Dolbear draw up.

"I'm going in here," he said. "So I'll wish you all 'good night.'"

Dingle, who knew the party was to pass, stood at his outer gate smoking. Only Lydia addressed him.

"Good night, Ned," she said, and he answered:

"Good night, mother."

Then the trap proceeded and Mr. Dolbear permitted himself to speak rather spitefully of Philander Knox.

"He ain't sound, that man," he declared. "He wants to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. You don't know where to have him in argument, the truth being he ain't much in earnest about anything in my opinion."

But Tom Dolbear modified this view before many days were passed. Indeed, had he listened to the conversation then proceeding between Philander and Mr. Dingle, he must have found himself confronted sharply and painfully with mistaken judgment; and Mr. Knox himself did not guess at the important events destined to fall out before

he slept that night. That certain things were presently to happen; that he would pluck his own occasions out of them and win a reward worthy of all his pains, he believed; but he did not know how near these things might be. Nor did he imagine how swiftly his own particular problems were destined to be solved. Now Medora's husband played into his hand with unexpected perception.

They spoke first concerning the lecture, and Ned heard without enthusiasm of its success.

"No doubt the only thing that concerns you is why your wife went," said Knox, "and I may tell you she went because she'd promised to go. It bored her stiff, same as it did Mrs. Trivett. They've got no use for the new paths, and Medora's just as much of a Tory at heart as you or her mother, though she wouldn't own to it. That's all over, any way. They've parted in a dignified fashion, and I've done the best day's work I ever have done in helping you to see the peculiar circumstances and putting the truth before you. Not that even my great efforts would have saved the situation if you hadn't believed me; but that was your stronghold: you knew I was telling truth. In fact, it's one of those cases where knowledge of the truth has helped the parties through the storm, and I'll be thankful to my dying day you was large-minded enough to receive and accept it. It was a great compliment to me that you could trust me, and a great advertisement to your brain power."

"It's all your work and I don't deny you the praise," answered Ned. "Of course, if things had been otherwise from what they are, nothing would have come of it; but as the facts are what we understand, then I'm half in a mind to take Medora back. I dare say the people will think I'm a silly, knock-kneed fool to do so; but those who know the truth would not. There's only one thing will prevent me, and that's the woman herself. I'll see her presently, and if she comes out of it in a decent spirit, then what I say may happen. But if there's a shadow of doubt about

it in her mind, then we'll stop as we are. It pretty much depends upon her now."

"In that case I congratulate you, because her spirit is contrite to the dust, and never, if she lives to be a hundred, will she fail of her duty again. She'll be a pattern to every married woman on earth for the rest of her life, no doubt. The highest and best she prays for is to be forgiven by you; but she don't dare to hope even that; and if she found she was more than forgiven, then her gratitude would rise to amazing heights, no doubt."

"Well it might," declared Dingle, and the other spoke again.

"Yes; and none better pleased than me; but though I hadn't thought we'd got nearly so far as this yet awhile, now I see that we have, I must speak a word more, Ned. What I'm going to say now is a terrible delicate thing; and yet, late though the hour is, this is the appointed time. Give me a spot of whiskey and switch off from yourself to me for five minutes."

"I was coming to you. I'm not blind, and I see very clearly what I owe you in this matter. You've took a deal of trouble, and I'm grateful, Knox, and so will everybody else be when they understand."

"I'm very glad you feel it so," answered Philander, "because it's true. I have took a lot of trouble, Ned, and I've spared no pains to bring this about, because well I knew from my experience of life that it was the best that could possibly happen for all concerned. And once convinced them two were innocent as babes, I set myself to save the situation, as they say. And I've helped you to do so; and it ain't a figure of speech to say I'm well paid by results. But that's not all there is to it. There was something up my sleeve too. I had another iron in the fire for myself. In a word, you can pay me handsome for all my trouble if you'll recognise that and lend me a hand in a certain quarter. Need I say what quarter? As you know, Mrs. Trivett's very much addicted to me,

and she'd marry me to-morrow if a mistaken call of duty didn't keep her in that breeding pen known as Priory Farm. Well, I put it to you whether you won't help me same as I helped you. One good turn deserves another — eh? ”

“ I'd go to the end of the world to help you, Knox. But what can I do? ”

“ You don't see? I'll tell you then. It sounds a bit strong, but it's safe enough and it'll do the trick. Above all you needn't feel a speck of fear, because your mother-in-law has a very fine affection for me, and to marry me will really be a great delight to her — that I assure you.”

“ What must I do then? ”

“ Merely tell Medora you don't look at her again unless Mrs. Trivett changes her name to Mrs. Knox. I'm not asking a difficult or troublesome thing. In fact, you needn't lift a finger in the matter. You can safely leave it to Medora. She'll praise God on her knees for a month of Sundays when she hears the grand ideas in your mind, and when you state the condition — there you are: she'll be on to her mother like a flame of fire, and Lydia will mighty soon see her duty.”

Ned Dingle laughed.

“ Lord, you're a deep one! ” he said.

“ Not me. Far from it. Just ordinary common sense, and a great natural regard for Medora's mother. Mind, I wouldn't ask if it wasn't a dead cert.”

“ It shall be done,” answered the younger man. “ You're a double chap, Knox, though you do claim to be so simple, and I'd rather have you for a friend than an enemy.”

“ I'll be your friend as long as I live, I promise you — and your wife also. A very good father-in-law you'll find me.”

They went to the door together and as Knox was about to depart, there came a swift foot down the lane. It was Jordan Kellock on his homeward way.

He stopped, seeing the men at the gate.

"I was going to call first thing to-morrow, Mr. Dingle," he said, "but since you're here I can speak now."

"And give me an arm afterwards," declared Knox. For the moon had set and it was very dark.

"Only this: the leaders liked what I said to-night, and they liked how I said it. In a word they have offered me propaganda work. I'm to travel about and have my headquarters in London. My life's begun in fact. I tell you this, because now you're free to go back to the Mill, for I shall not."

"Giving up paper-making?" asked Philander.

"Yes, Knox. I shall never touch a mould again."

"Then you'll never know if you've lost your stroke, or get it back."

"All's one now. There's only Mrs. Dingle to consider. Have you been able to make up your mind in that matter yet, Mr. Dingle?"

"I have," said Ned; "but she don't know it and I'll thank you not to tell her. That's my job."

"Thank God," said Kellock.

"And Knox," added Ned. "But for him there's no shadow of doubt things would have happened differently. But as luck would have it you confided in him, and so did I; and being what he is, he puts his intellects into the thing and saved us."

"I shan't forget it," said Kellock.

"And we shan't forget you," declared Knox. "You're all three mighty well out of this, and though you've been an amazing ass, yet there was a fine quality in your foolishness that saved the situation. You've all got peace with honour in fact; and may you profit by your lesson and your luck."

Then Knox and Kellock set off down the hill together.

CHAPTER XXX

FIRE BEACON HILL

FREE horizons stretched about the grassy summit of Fire Beacon, a culminating ridge above Dart.

It ascended from a glorious ambit of hill and valley, moor and sea; and on this silvery noon of early summer, light rained out of the zenith and echoed in the scattered cloud argosies that sailed from the north to seaward. Under them spread a mosaic of multicoloured fields netted with hedges and knotted with copses or spinneys, grey hamlets and little thorpes. The million breasts of Artemis Devonian undulated beneath the shining patchwork and faded into distance over many leagues of sunkissed weald and wold, until they rippled dimly to the foothills and forest edges of Dartmoor, where the high lands were flung hugely out from east to west. To-day the Moor shone full of delicate colour under the sun. It rose and fell in a lustrous opaline sky line of gentle salients; it melted at the magic of the universal light and seemed no more than a delicate veil of grey and azure imposed transparently upon the brighter blue above it. From Hey Tor to Rippon it rolled, to Buckland and Holne Moor, with shadowy glimpses of Hameldon and remote Cosdon; to Dean Moor and Harford, by Eastern Beacon and Western Beacon, Lee Moor and Shell Top and far border heights that brooded through the milky hazes of the west.

Beneath Fire Beacon lay the clustered dwellings of East Cornworthy, and beyond them, deep in the heart of the land, shone Dart where there bent away Bow Creek above Stoke Gabriel. The river wound argent through a dimple

of the bending hills, while easterly, by broad passages of woodland and fallow, opened the ways to the sea. Tor Bay stretched there with white Torquay glittering pearly under her triple hills; and far beyond them, touched through the haze by a falling sunshaft, glimmered the headlands eastward, cliff beyond cliff, where the red sandstone of Devon gave to the golden oolites of Dorset. Then ranged the sea-line and rolled wide waters soaked with light, whereon the clouds not only flung down their shadows, but poured their reflections also, so that the sea was radiant as the land.

Fire Beacon bore hay, and as the wind rippled the distant waters, so here, through ripening grass, over sparkling white daisies and russet sorrel, it ran and swept and sent a lustre, that danced upon the hill and stroked the herbage with fitful waves of light. A cuckoo called from an elm top and overhead wheeled the gulls to link earth and sea together.

Hither climbed a party of four holiday makers, of whom two were middle-aged and two were young. The more youthful pair walked some hundred yards ahead and bore between them a hamper; their elders breasted the great hill more leisurely and stopped sometimes upon the way. Once, where a grassy dip in the hedge bank invited them to do so, they sat down to rest for a while.

Ned and Medora reached the crown of Fire Beacon and sought a place for their picnic under the nearest hedge. They found it presently, but waited until Lydia and Philander should arrive and approve.

Perfect understanding appeared to obtain between the husband and wife. Medora was attired in a pre-Kellock gown, which Mr. Dingle had always admired. Indeed she had given the garments that came from London to Daisy Finch. She had been highly ingenious in returning to the old régime at every minute particular, and in banishing to the void any evidence of the inter-regnum. She came back to Ned sufficiently contrite and sufficiently grateful and

thankful. Her tact had been sharpened by tribulation, and remembering very well what was good to her husband, she wasted not much time on tears of repentance or promises of future well doing. She let her luck take the form of joyousness — which suited Dingle best. Her gratitude assumed the most agreeable shape from his point of view, for she exhibited such delight in her home and such radiant happiness in his company that he found himself content. Nor, for once, was there any simulation on Medora's part. She felt the satisfaction she expressed. She appreciated the extent of her remarkable good fortune and desired nothing more than a return to the life she had under-valued. They were for the moment not talking of themselves, but Medora's mother.

"Poor dear! You may say that Aunt Mary and Uncle Tom pretty well cast her out," said Mrs. Dingle. "A proper shame I call it, and a proper lesson not to work your fingers to the bone for other people's children. You'd think mother was a traitor to 'em, instead of the best friend they ever had, or will have — selfish creatures."

"Well, you've done her a very good turn by getting her out of that house. Knox will know how to value such a fine woman, though it's contrary to nature that two old blades like them should feel all younger people feel, I suppose."

"He feels enough not to let mother work in the Mill any more," said Medora.

"And you know you need not, if you don't want."

"I do, you dear. But I'm only too jolly thankful to be back there and that's the truth. I'd sooner be there than anywhere, because I'm nearer to you all day, and we can eat our dinner together. But mother's different and Mr. Knox has very dignified ideas how she should live at her age."

"You say 'at her age,' but be blessed if this racket hasn't knocked years off her," said Ned. "I can quite

imagine a man of half a century old might think her good-looking."

By a curious coincidence Philander was stating the same opinion half a mile down the hill. Indeed Lydia's face seemed a palimpsest to Mr. Knox, and through more recent writings, to her countenance there would still come a twinkle from the past and a flash and flush, that penetrated thirty years of Time's caligraphy and seemed to recreate her features, even to a little curl at the corner of her under-lip, that belonged to youth and had been delicious then.

Mr. Knox perceived these things.

"Dammy, you're growing younger under my very eyes, Lydia," he said.

She laughed.

"Tom didn't think so," she answered. "He said that for an aged woman —"

"Get him out of your mind," said Mr. Knox. "The forties are often very unmerciful to the fifties — a trick of human nature I can't explain."

"I know I'm younger; and it's largely along of you, Philander, but not all. You can understand how the thought of them two up there have made me younger. I never dreamed they could come together again — not in my most hopeful moments."

"That's because you didn't know how short a distance they'd really fallen apart."

"'Tis too good to be true. I'm frightened of it."

"Not you," he said. "You never was frightened of anything and never will be."

"For that matter there is a dark side," explained Lydia, "and I'm almost glad there is in a way, because if there wasn't, the whole story would be contrary to nature and would tumble down like a pack of cards."

"There's no dark side, and I won't have you say there is, Lyddy. Why shouldn't the Lord hatch a piece of

happiness for four humans once in a way, if He's got a mind to do it?"

"It ain't the Almighty; it's my people at Priory Farm. I heard some bitter things there I do assure you."

"I'll bet you did," said Mr. Knox. "I can see 'em at you. And I can also very well guess what they said about me."

"Especially Mary. I never heard her use such language, and I never saw her so properly awake before. But I was glad after, because when she called you a crafty old limb of the Dowl, that got my fighting spirit up and they heard a home truth or two. I thought they were very different stuff."

"If you take people as you find 'em, you'll make friends," answered Mr. Knox; "but if you take people as you fancy 'em, you will not. No doubt folk are very flattered at first to find our opinion of 'em is as high as their opinion of themselves. But that don't last. We can't for long think of any fellow creature as highly as he thinks of himself. The strain's too great, and so, presently, we come down to the truth about our friend; and he sees we know it and can't forgive us. So the friendship fades out, because it was built on fancy and not on reality. That's what happens to most friendships in the long run."

"I suppose I never got quite a true picture of my brother's wife," admitted Lydia.

"You did not. And what's hurting her so sharp for the minute and making her so beastly rude is — not so much your going, as your knowing the truth about her. But don't you fret. They'll cringe presently. I dare say they'll be at our wedding yet."

"I wish I could think so," she answered. "But it ought to come right, for, after all, I'm a mother too, and what choice had I when Ned got me in a corner like that?"

"Not an earthly," declared Mr. Knox."

They joined Ned and Medora presently. The view was

nothing to any of them, but the elders welcomed the breeze at hill top. Their talk concerned the wedding.

"A very Christian spirit in the air," Philander asserted. "Even Nicholas Pinhey has forgiven me, thanks to your mother, Medora. He dropped in on Saturday, and he said, 'You called me a caterpillar, not so very many weeks ago, Mr. Knox,' and I answered, 'I'm afraid you're right.' And he said, 'Yes; and when you done so, I thought it was a case of "Father, forgive him, for he knows not what he sayeth."' And I wish you to understand that I forgive it and forget it also, out of respect for Mrs. Trivett. The man that Mrs. Trivett thinks good enough to marry must have some virtues hidden from common eyes,' said Nicholas to me."

"And Mercy Life's forgiven me," said Medora. "I wouldn't let her have any peace till she did. And Alice Barefoot passes the time of day even! That's thanks to mother of course."

"They're getting up a fine wedding present for mother in the rag house," announced Ned. "It's a secret, but Henry Barefoot told me. It's going to take the shape of a tea service, I believe."

"I can't see myself away from the rag house," murmured Mrs. Trivett.

"You couldn't see yourself away from Priory Farm, mother," said Medora.

"'Tis a want of imagination in you, Lydia," declared Mr. Knox. "You'll say you can't see yourself married to me next. But that you certainly will see inside a month from Sunday."

They spoke of various matters that interested them; then Mr. Knox mentioned Kellock.

"Strange that a man born and bred under the apple trees of Ashprington should show these gifts. A great paper maker; and as if that was not enough, a power of talk and a talent for politics. Not that he'll ever be half

as good in his new line as he was in his old. A man can't rise to be first class at two crafts."

"The Labour Party will swallow him up, and we shan't hear no more about him, I expect," said Lydia.

"That's it. He hadn't the very highest gifts to deal with his fellow men — not the touch of genius — too deadly serious and narrow. You feel about that sort a very proper respect; but you'd a long sight sooner live with their statues than themselves. 'Tis always uncomfortable living with heroes — even little tin ones — but when time has took 'em and just kneaded what good they've done into the common wealth of human progress — then we can feel kindly to their memories."

"Ope the hamper, Ned," said Lydia.

THE END





